Beep-beep, Eddie Kaspbrak

Ragno

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Summary:

Eddie Kaspbrak is 14 years old and he just defeated a demonic clown along with his friends.

Eddie Kaspbrak is 16 years old and he's fighting against himself and the way he feels and the way he thinks.

Eddie Kaspbrak is 18 years old and he'd much rather fight a demonic clown all over again than face his true feelings for Richie Tozier.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

> I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know where this is going, and I don't even know why I'm writing this. The only thing I know is I watched a movie and then I read a book, and now I'm in love with two characters and I can't stop writing. You didn't ask for this but me neither, so bear with me at least for one story (who knows if I'll write more).
>
> There will be some elements from the movie and some from the book. This story starts right after they defeat Pennywise for the first time and it goes on from there. My first language is not English so expect some mistakes. Also, I'm not sure yet but the rating might change because if you think 18-year-olds don't curse and fight and fuck then you don't know what is like to be 18. Or you forgot. Or you're a prude.

Eddie had hoped going back to school would make things normal again. Like a reset. Like sitting on a chair with a notebook on his desk while he listens to a boring teacher would make him forget about how not even months ago he and his friends were almost murdered by an evil creature dressed as a fucking clown. It still makes him feel like he’s about to be sick.

The first day of school after that summer was fucking weird. In fact, the first day after the killed It was even weirder. One would expect the world to change after such an even, killing an evil force of nature, saving a whole town. Everything was the same. People kept living their lives, grocery shopping, reading the newspaper, mowing their lawns. Everything was the same except for them.

“D-d-don’t worry, Eddie. It’ll g-get better,” Bill had said, and Eddie had wanted to believe him even when he just couldn’t.

It did get better, though, in a certain way. After all, they had to keep on with their lives even if they didn’t want to, going to school, doing homework, doing chores. It was a matter of time to start going to the movies again, to start joking again, to start laughing again. Richie helped a lot with that too. Of all of them, Richie seemed like he took it the best way, even though Eddie suspected he felt the same as the rest. It didn’t matter, because seeing Richie act like everything was okay made everyone start feeling like everything was okay, or like it could be okay in a not too distant future.

“It’s the nightmares, you know? And… and sometimes I see a shadow and I jump. I don’t even think there’s something there, it’s my body. It’s like my body gets scared before I even know what’s going on,” Eddie had confessed once when they were throwing rocks at the river.

“Don’t ya worry, my good fella! I won’t evah let those bloody shadows get you, wot-wot?” Richie had replied in one of his voices, flashing a big smile and pinching Eddie’s cheek. “Cute lads like ya shall not worry their head with such mattahs.”

“You’re such an idiot,” Eddie had said, but he was smiling because that’s a thing Richie knew how to do for sure. He knew how to make people smile.

He knows how to make Eddie smile.

It’s always been weird, always, not just now when a lot of things are weird, but from the beginning. Richie Tozier was always kind of a mystery to Eddie, like something he couldn’t totally get but made him want to keep looking, keep learning about it, trying to finally understand it. Eddie doubts even Richie understands himself, but he thinks he’s pretty close.

“I think I would let a leper blow me for free if he didn’t have any teeth. Think about it. It’d be a pretty smooth blowjob,” Richie says and Eddie looks at him horrified. Maybe he’s not that close to understanding him after all.

“You’re so fucking disgusting,” Eddie spits, and Bill chuckles a little while Stan just rolls his eyes.

They’re going down to the Barrens and Richie is poking at things with a stick he has found God knows were and looks like someone already used it to poke at a rotting corpse because there’s something slimy covering one of the ends. Eddie is walking as far from it as he can because he has seen Richie’s face when he had warned: “if you go anywhere near me with that thing I swear I’ll fucking kill you.”

They find a hole close to a few big rocks, not big enough to be a rabbit’s den but definitely big enough to have some animal inside.

“Maybe it’s a snake nest,” Stan says, and he takes a step back when Richie gets closer, poking at it with his stick.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Eddie slaps Richie’s hand, but he doesn’t let the stick go. “What if there are snakes in there?”

“It c-can be dangerous. Some snakes are v-v-venomous. You s-shou-shouldn’t disturb them.” Bill says, twisting his lips a little.

“It’s okay. I have my stick to protect me,” Richie says, poking at the hole again, making Eddie furious.

“Yeah? Well, tell me how a stick is gonna protect you when a snake bites you, fuckface. Are you going to poke at the bite ’til the venom just goes away? Huh? Do you know what a snake bite can do to you? ‘Cause first the bite gets all nasty and disgusting and your skin starts to rot, and then your blood gets all liquid and starts coming out of your eyes and your nose and your mouth, and you die!”

“That’s if you don’t suck the wound. You need to suck the venom and spit it out, and then go to the hospital,” Stan corrects him.

“Hey Eddie, would you suck my wound if a snake bites me?” Richie asks with a stupid smile on his face.

“I’d let you die on the spot.”

“What if it bites my dick. Would you suck my wound then?” Richie laughs.

“How is that an improvement??” Eddie throws his hands in the air. “If a snake bites your dick I hope you lose it so you stop talking about it.”

“Or maybe it’ll get even bigger and I’ll have a super dick.”

“Beep-beep, Richie.”

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It’s always like that, no matter how much time passes, they end up in the Barrens, sometimes reading comics, sometimes playing guns, sometimes just talking. Bill and Ben miss Beverly the most, and they talk on the phone sometimes, so when it happens they share with the rest the things she’s told them. Mike comes along sometimes too, but just on the weekends because he has a lot of work to do. They feel less like kids when Mike is around and Mike feels less like an adult when they hang out and he can act his age. No matter what happens or what they do, though, Richie is always the same. His bad jokes, and his even worse voices, and his constant smile, and his huge eyes behind his huge glasses.

Maybe Eddie is starting to think of Richie too much.

It’s always the same, it’s true, but they’ve changed, it’s obvious they’ve changed, and they also keep changing, their bodies, their minds. Ben is getting taller and his weight starts sitting differently in his body. Mike is strong, so much stronger than before, and every time he invites the Losers home for dinner they can see how he’s already the man of the house. Bill almost doesn’t stutter anymore, and he’s starting to get some attention from the girls at school. He’s handsome, he always was, but now he’s more confident, and that shows. And then it’s Richie. Richie and his long black curls and his long fingers and his inches taller because it seems like he’s decided to grow everything at the same time. Richie and his stupid, so stupid trash mouth, with his stupid, oh so stupid full lips. And his voice.

Eddie's voice has changed too, but it's nothing compared to Richie's. Eddie still has to deal with those awful squeaky sounds coming out of his mouth now and then, his voice trying to adjust to the changes. Richie's voice is deep, rich. Eddie's voice is like a cat scratching a violin. It's like, while Richie hit puberty, puberty hit Eddie. On the face. With a chair.

Sometimes he wonders if the rest of the guys feel the same. Of course, he doesn't ask because guys don't talk about those things and he's not a sissy. Maybe if Bev had stayed he could talk to her about it, about how sometimes he feels like everybody is growing up and becoming men and he still feels like a kid. He hopes that changes when he goes to college in a couple of years, although he still needs to convince his mom he won't die if he lives alone. He needs to convince himself too, to be honest.

"You can always live with me, Eddie Spagh—Unf!" Richie laughs when Eddie clasps his hand over his mouth, shutting him up. "Yrrsoqwt."

"I'm not cute. I'm fifteen and fed up with your bullshit nicknames. So cut it already," Eddie says and gives him a dirty look before he moves his hand down again. "And like you're going to college anyway…" He adds, just to see Richie bring his hand to his chest, gasping, absolutely offended. "I should ask Stan, though. He will go to a good college for sure."

"You insult me. I won't tolerate this disrespect!" Eddie is laughing when Richie grabs a pillow and hit him straight in the face.

They start a pillow fight and Eddie can't stop laughing. If they were at Eddie's home he knows his mom would be there right in the moment asking them to stop and warning them of the dangers of pillow fighting. They're at Richie's, though, and Richie's parents don't really care about what they do. Richie's dad is not even home. His mom is but it's the same as if she weren't.

It gets rough because they don't know how to fight without hurting themselves, they're still kids that way. Richie takes advantage of his height and pushes Eddie down, climbing on top of him and pressing the pillow against his face. They're playing around, Eddie knows, but

the first thing he thinks when he starts suffocating is: 'I'm gonna die'. So he fights back even harder, kicking and punching and making Richie laugh until he doesn't laugh anymore.

"Hey! Hey! Okay! It's okay! Jay-sus, you wild," Richie chuckles when Eddie throws the pillow away, looking at Richie all red and bothered.

"You almost killed me here, motherfucker," he spits, breathing fast, his chest moving up and down trying to get as much air as possible.

"Oh, so your mom finally told you about us," Richie laughs, stopping Eddie's arms holding his wrists when he tries to punch him. "Easy! I wouldn't let you die, Eds. I'd save your life with my scout skills. Mouth to mouth resuscitation. Sounding heartbeats. Intimidation." Richie sings, laughing again and fighting Eddie, trying to put his disgusting mouth on him.

"Stop it, asshole!" Eddie fights back, but he's laughing uncontrollably again, protecting himself with his arms while Richie sticks out his tongue and wiggles it making stupid noises and trying to lick him.

"Eddie, are you okay? Eddie, are you okay? Are you okay, Eddie?" Richie sings in between laughs, trying to move Eddie's arms out of the way. Eddie can't help it, he's laughing too much and he's getting weaker, so Richie takes advantage of it and manages to push Eddie's arms to the side, licking a strip up Eddie's face, across his mouth.

"No!! Gross!!" Eddie jumps and makes a grossed out face, spitting and wiping his mouth hard while Richie can't stop laughing hysterically. "Your spit got in my mouth! Eww!" Eddie wipes his tongue with the back of his hand and Richie falls down on the bed laughing. "You taste like trash, Trashmouth."

"Now you know what your mom tastes like," Richie laughs and screams when Eddie grabs another pillow and jumps on top of him, pressing it hard against Richie's head. Richie laughs and fights back a little, but then he stops fighting, letting his limbs fall on the bed. Eddie knows he's playing around, but he can't help feeling a little anxious when he takes the pillow back. He laughs in relief when he sees Richie's stupid face with his tongue out and crossed-eyed. "You killed me Eds. Save my life. Quick!" He says making voices.

“Stay dead,” Eddie responds with a satisfied smile, letting himself fall down by Richie’s side. They both laugh again, the type of laugh you enjoy when you’re young and stupid and life couldn’t feel better. Eddie didn’t know he could feel like that again, not after the clown. And still, here they are.

“It’s getting pretty late,” Richie says, moving his head to the side to look at Eddie. “You staying over? We can call your mom.”

Eddie looks at him too, thinking about it. His mom is not fond of sleepovers, even less when they’re at Richie’s house, and even less when it’s just Richie there and not the rest of the guys too. However, Eddie can’t think of anything better right now than staying right where he is.

“Yeah, let’s call my mom.” It’s worth a try.

*

Eddie doesn’t know what’s the deal with being sixteen, but the moment he reaches that age it’s like everything changes even faster than before, or maybe he just wasn’t paying attention. He’s almost glad Bev is not in Derry anymore because suddenly it’s like all his friends can think of is *girls*. Yes, he knows it’s not that new, they all had gotten crushes on girls on TV and some real-life girls too, but it’s different just having a crush than acting on it.

It’s Ben and Bill the first ones who start dating, girls from their clubs in high school and the like. Stan dates too, but not as much, and only Jewish girls because his dad would kill him otherwise. Richie dates, or so he says, but he’s been joking about being a heartthrob since forever so that’s nothing new to Eddie. He, on the other hand… just can’t see the appeal on it.

Girls are pretty, that’s for sure. Girls are so, so pretty. They’re pretty and kind and soft and… boring. Or not! Or not, because some girls are not like that, it’s true. Other girls are strong and fun and witty

and… also boring. Or, okay, there are also girls who are mean, and ugly and stupid, and definitely boring. But there are also girls like Bev. She's smart, and pretty, and strong, and fun, and she's not boring… But she is. She's not boring to hang out with, for sure, she's not boring for a friend. But she is… for a date.

Maybe Eddie hasn't found the right girl yet, the one that doesn't make him feel bored out of his mind just thinking about dating her. He's sure they're too young to be thinking about girls anyway, he doesn't get why his friends would prefer going to the movies or to the smoothie hut with some random girl than spending the day hanging out with each other.

"Going to the movies or to the smoothie hut… and also making out," Richie corrects him once, and the rest of the guys laugh and blush at the same time. "And getting some action if you're lucky."

"You s-should try kissing a gi-girl sometime, Eddie. Maybe you'll s-see the difference," Bill says, and Eddie frowns. Okay, so now even Bill mocks him.

"Just saying. Kissing sounds gross. Like why would I want anyone to spit in my mouth? Do you even know how many different bacteria are in a human mouth?"

"Some of the best things in life are gross," Richie says. Eddie makes a face, as well a Stan.

"That's so not true," Stan replies, and Eddie is about to thank him when he adds. "But kissing is not gross anyway. Especially when girls wear those gooey things on their lips…"

"Eeeww!"

"No, but like, it smells nice. And tastes nice," Stan adds, blushing a little.

"And it feels good on your dick," Richie adds, and everybody laughs except Eddie. Even Stan laughs. Eddie feels betrayed.

The thing is, Eddie can see how his friends may like girls and think about doing sexual things to them, with them. He can see Bill being

all romantic, and for sure Ben is the type of guy who finds his high school sweetheart and never breaks up and has the perfect family. When it comes to Stan it's almost the same. Sure Stan is more reserved than the others, but Eddie bets he'll be the first to marry. Or maybe Mike. Mike is already dating someone, but Eddie always thought Mike was more mature than the rest of them, so that doesn't surprise him. Richie, on the other hand… Eddie just can't see it.

It's like Eddie can't imagine Richie in a romantic or sexual situation. He doesn't really think about it because thinking about Richie and sex is thinking of jokes and stupid comments, like if a life of dirty jokes has made Richie completely asexual in Eddie's eyes. He can picture Richie talking about sex but he can't picture him actually doing it. If Eddie thinks of Richie sexually the only image in his mind is Richie doing stand-up comedy making some inappropriate comment about his mom.

That's why, when it happens, Eddie thinks he's about to have a severe asthma attack.

He doesn't walk on Richie having sex, thank God, because Eddie doesn't think he could have survived that, but it's something close anyway. They're kissing. Richie and some, some girl, Eddie doesn't even know who she is, he doesn't think he's seen her before. They're kissing right in front of Richie's house. They're not even hiding, they're just there in plain sight. Eddie turns around immediately, feeling his lungs contract and his body shake.

He wishes he still wore his fanny pack because that would make so much easier for him to reach his inhaler. No matter how fast he turned around, the images are still there repeating inside his brain. The way Richie was pressing her against the wall, how eager they looked, his hand holding up her thigh, his lips… Jesus. Richie doesn't. Richie doesn't kiss like that. Richie can't kiss like that. Eddie shakes his inhaler and puts it between his lips while he tries to breathe, repeating himself mentally 'stop it, stop it, you're not even truly asthmatic, asshole' and triggering a couple of puffs right into his throat.

"Eddie, my man! You're early. So eager to see me?" He hears Richie joke behind him. He takes a couple of seconds to breathe properly

before he turns around again. There's no girl to be seen, and it would almost look like Eddie imagined it all if it wasn't for the way Richie's lips look all puffy and red.

"Did you bring a girl over??" He asks in shock, and he almost sounds like a pissed off dad who just discovered his teen son threw a party home without permission. Richie looks taken aback for a moment, but then he laughs proudly and shrugs like it's no big deal.

"Oh, you saw that. What can I say, I'm a charmer…" He jokes again, but Eddie is not having it, not today.

"So you have no little respect even for your own house. Like, like, what if your parents saw you? Huh? Right in front of your door!" He's getting mad and he doesn't know why, but he's shaking. He's furious. Like what Richie just did offends him in every possible way.

"What the fuck, Eds, you know my parents don't give a sh—"

"Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Just…" Eddie throws his hands in the air and grunts, turning around again and walking away. There's no good reason to do what he's doing, but he can't help it, his legs are moving and he can't control them.

"Eddie!" Richie calls him in the distance. "Eds, what about the project?" Richie asks because, oh, yeah, that was the reason Eddie came to Richie's house in the first place. Well, fuck the project. He should have known better than to bring a girl over and sucking her face in front of Eddie. Even if that doesn't make any sense. Fuck.

"Don't fucking call me Eds!" Eddie screams and he doesn't even look back. He doesn't want to see Richie's face to confirm how crazy he's acting right now.

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He should be thankful Richie is the less resentful person in the whole wide world. He doesn't even bring it up the next time they see each

other at school. He just looks worried, maybe cautious, not saying much until Eddie starts talking to him like everything is normal. That's all Richie needs to go back to the way he always is.

Eddie never catches him with another girl ever again.

That doesn't mean Richie stops dating, Eddie is sure of that because the guys keep talking about girls more and more. It becomes a preferred topic over comics, games, and the rest of stuff. He's the only one who keeps feeling grossed out when his friends talk about making out, touching, first base, second base. They're good friends, though, because they never look at Eddie wrong, they don't pressure him to do anything. It just becomes his thing, like how much he hates getting dirty or how afraid he is of catching a disease. Now they add the 'Eddie is too much of a germaphobic to kiss a girl' and they just roll with it. Eddie would correct them and say it's not exactly like that, but he doesn't know what exactly is, so he just leaves it be.

He just doesn't think about it, girls. He thought about it for a while, at first, when all of his friends caught the girl fever. He thought maybe it would happen to him eventually, but it just didn't, so he stopped worrying. Stan said something once about how Catholic priest never marry and must be celibates, and that made Eddie think maybe he was destined to be a Catholic priest, but that only lasted for, like, two days, and only took Richie joking about just jerking off to Jesus for the rest of your life for Eddie to get the thought out of his mind. It was like that for a while, just not thinking about the topic, and he was happy with it. Until he was forced to think about it again.

It was Bill's seventeen birthday, and Mike said they could use the barn to throw a party. Eddie didn't like parties too much. The whole idea of a bunch of people sharing breath and sweat in a closed room made him feel itchy. But it was a party for Bill, so that meant, as much as Bill had become a lot more popular than when they were kids, not too many people would attend. Of course, he would have preferred just a nice little party for the Losers, but it wasn't his birthday, it was Bill's.

They all helped clean up and prepare things, or they all did except Richie, who was just cracking jokes about what would happen when Beverly arrived at the party, asking Ben and Bill to fight for her in a

duel.

“Bill is the birthday boy after all. It’d be rude to take her from him on his day,” Ben said. He didn’t need to fight for any girl’s attention. That’s all he got lately. He seemed pretty satisfied with it, though.

“Or, you know, maybe she could choose. Since she’s a person and has free will and everything,” Stand added. “Maybe she ditches you both and goes for Eddie.”

All the guys laughed, Eddie too. That would be awesome, although he’d feel bad for Bev. He doesn’t think it could happen for real anyway. Eddie doesn’t think anyone would choose him over Bill or Ben.

When people start to come, Eddie starts feeling a bit anxious. There are more people than he expected. He guesses a party is a party, after all, no matter the reason or the host. He has some fruit punch he knows is spiked just to see if that helps him feel more comfortable. It tastes weird and it doesn’t make him want to talk to random people like Richie said it would, but he feels like he cares less about what people can think of him, so he just stays in a corner talking to Stan because he’s the only one who feels the same about parties.

Beverly does come to the party. Her aunt had to come to Derry for a few days and she decided to come with her. It was really lucky to have it coincide with Bill’s birthday, although Eddie had preferred if it was just a normal day so they could all hang out down in the Barrens or at the Quarry. She’s smoking and her hair is different. Her face is different too and her body has changed. She looks older, somehow sophisticated, and way cooler than them. She’s still her friend, though, and they talk for a while before she goes to find the rest of the Losers, promising to hang out together the next day.

It gets boring after that, after Bev leaves and after Stan decides he’s going home early. He asks Eddie if he wants a ride home too, and Eddie regrets saying no because that means now he needs to wait for Richie or Bill to go home, and it doesn’t look like that will happen soon. He wishes he had his own car, but of course, his mom wouldn’t allow him to drive. Driving is too dangerous. Do you know how many people die in car crashes, Eddie-bear?

He opens a beer someone has brought and sits on the first empty couch he sees. He takes a sip and puts the beer down to never pick it up again. Fucking disgusting, he doesn't understand how the hell his friends can drink that shit. It's even worse than the punch. Half an hour passes and Eddie is honestly thinking about walking home when someone falls down on the couch by his side, putting an arm around him and smiling stupidly.

"Are you drunk??" Eddie asks. It wouldn't surprise him. Richie is the kind of person who would do that. He was the first to smoke, he was the first to drink, Eddie is sure he'll be the first to go into an alcoholic coma.

"Nope," Richie answers with the same stupid smile on his face. Then he chuckles. "Maybe a little. Come on, Eddie-baby, don't get mad at poor Richie. He's just having some fuuuun."

"So now you use the third person when you talk about yourself. What's the next—" Eddie stops talking when Richie gets closer. Too close. So close it makes Eddie gulp and breathes deep and fast, leaning back a little, his hand ready to reach his inhaler. Richie doesn't do anything else, though. He just looks at Eddie. Looks at him closely. "What?"

"You have a lot of freckles on top of your nose. And over your cheeks," Richie says with a chuckle. They're so close. Eddie never thought Richie would pay attention to those things, Eddie never thought Richie would look at him like this. He feels self-conscious.

"Nice observation, dipshit. So what?" He asks defensively. Richie just chuckles even more, his stupid laugh sending shivers down Eddie's spine.

"They're cute." It's Richie's voice as well as his smile what makes Eddie get all red and even more frustrated. Richie seems to like it. "You're cute, but they make you even cuter now. You're so cute I'd bite your cheeks, Eds."

"Don't call me Eds." He'd like to sound firmer, but his body feels like pudding filled with chunks of 'what the fuck is going on'. Richie feels warm near him, and that's making Eddie's temperature rise.

Especially in one particular place.

“Why?” Richie asks, and that’s not what Eddie was expecting at all, but once again, Eddie doesn’t know what the hell he’s expecting. He must look as puzzled as he feels because Richie laughs and asks again. “Why can’t I call you Eds?”

“I… don’t…” Richie leans closer, so close it pokes Eddie’s cheek with his nose, so close Eddie can feel Richie’s breath on his skin.

“You don’t like it? Eds is cute. Just like you,” Richie moves again, and now he’s almost over Eddie, leg pressed against leg, Richie’s chest resting on Eddie’s arm and shoulder, Richie’s lips… “I’m gonna bite your cheek, Eds.”

“Hey, Eddie, do you need—“ Beverly’s voice startles him so bad Eddie jumps and moves away from Richie in less than a second. His heart is racing, pumping in his ears, and he doesn’t know how he’s managing to breathe right now. Maybe he’s not breathing. Yeah, that might be it. Maybe he’s *dead*. “Oh. Um. I just…” Beverly looks away and points back. “I’m leaving and I thought maybe you’d want a ride home?”

“Oh. Yes. Yes, sure. Okay. Okay, cool,” Eddie answers quickly, standing up almost as quick, bumping against Richie and walking to the door. “Bye, Richie,” he says without looking back. He even walks past Beverly and doesn’t wait for her to get out of the house. He needs fresh air. He needs… He needs to punch himself in the face.

The first thing he does when he finally gets out is reaching for his inhaler, putting it between his lips. He’s about to trigger it when he realizes something. He doesn’t need it. Maybe he’s still in shock, maybe he hasn’t had the time to freak out, but the thing is… he’s fine.

Okay, no, he’s not fine, he’s way far from being just fine, but he’s not freaking out and that’s something. He’s sure he will, though, the moment he gets home, he knows he will freak out. But now. Right now. Damn, right now Eddie feels like he’s in a fucking cloud. A weird as fuck cloud, so high it makes him dizzy and a little sick to his stomach, but a cloud.

Fucking Richie.

“You ready?” Bev asks and Eddie jumps again. “Jesus, Eddie, chill,” she laughs and Eddie frowns.

“You should wear a bell.”

“And avoid walking on people in weird situations? No way.”

2. Chapter 2

Beverly thinks they should date. And by ‘they’ she doesn’t mean Eddie and her, no. No, of course not. By ‘they’ she means Eddie and Richie. She thinks they, Richie and Eddie, should date. And she thinks so because she’s fucking out of her mind. Eddie had to number the reasons why that idea was the stupidest idea on the surface of the planet.

First of all, he’s not gay. And that’s a pretty important part.

Second, Richie is absolutely not gay, nor interested in Eddie *at all*. He’s too busy sucking on random girls faces to even pay attention to Eddie anymore, so yeah, no. Fuck no.

Third, is she crazy? Queers in Derry? Does she want him to get *killed*??

Fourth, he’s *not* gay. Isn’t that enough? He thinks it’s more than enough.

And fifth. Shut up, Beverly, you don’t even live here anymore.

He gives her those reasons, explains them to her, elaborates them too. He takes the whole way back home trying to convince Bev why she’s mental and she should look for professional help is she’s even considered the idea of Richie fucking Trashmouth Tozier and him dating. He does that, and he thinks he does a pretty good job. Only when they’re at his door and he’s about to get down, she smiles and says. “It’s funny, ‘cause you gave me a lot of reasons but you never said you didn’t like Richie that way.” That fucking witch makes Eddie get all red and stupid and also mute. “See you tomorrow, Eddie!” She waves her goodbye, closes the passenger door and drives away, leaving Eddie standing there at his own front door, red, and stupid,

and lost.

So.

So he likes…

So he likes Richie Tozier.

What a fucking nightmare.

He can't sleep that night. Who could sleep after finding out they're totally and absolutely fucked up in every possible way? Because of all people, of course Eddie had to put his eyes on the most stupid, self-centered, good-for-nothing asshole on earth. And why? No. No, he really wants to know. Why? Just because he's handsome? Just because his stupid eyes are too big even without glasses and his lips are too inviting and he's always laughing or at least smiling no matter how shitty things are? Just because he's always touching Eddie and saying he's cute and making him feel all flustered when he gets too close but also takes care of him, worries about him, worries about his friends, and never gets mad when people tell him to shut up? Just because he's Richie? Jesus, really? He likes Richie just because *he's Richie*?? What the fuck is wrong with him??

Eddie rolls over once again. He's never moved this much in bed. He usually wakes up in the same position he fell asleep, for God's sake, and now the sheets are a mess because he can't stop moving. He wants to pick up the phone and call the troublemaker, tell him 'this is your fault, asshole, look what you're making of me' only he couldn't because Richie's probably not home yet. He's probably still partying. He's probably talking to some girl. Or not just talking. Eddie feels a tight knot in his stomach.

Fuck. Now he feels like crying. Awesome.

He hates Beverly so much. Obliviousness was absolutely better than this.

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Life goes on. Eddie already knows life doesn't stop because of you, no matter what extraordinaire event occurs, no matter how much it affects you, life just doesn't give a fuck. So the next day is the same as the day before. And the day after that. And the day after that. The only thing that changes is inside Eddie. Inside his stomach to be precise. And even that doesn't change that much, because the feeling was always there, only Eddie didn't know what the fuck it was. Now he knows it's stupid butterflies.

Thank God Richie never talks about the party, about what happened. Eddie doubts he remembers anything, not because he was that drunk but because Eddie doubts Richie cares about it at all. Why remember something you don't give a fuck about? Eddie remembers, of course, no matter how much he tries to forget. Now he can't even look at Richie without thinking about it, without questioning himself. Why does he want to fix Richie's hair, why can't he look away from the way Richie holds his pen when he writes, why his eyes drift to Richie's lips when he talks.

Eddie used to have answers for all of that. He wants to fix Richie's hair because it's a mess and Eddie can't stand messy things. He can't look away from the way Richie holds his pen because it's all wrong and he looks like he's going to stab the paper instead of writing and he should learn how to hold the pen like an adult. His eyes drift to Richie's lips when he talks because Richie is always making stupid voices and sometimes Eddie doesn't even understand what he's saying, so maybe reading his lips is easier than listening to him.

Bullshit.

Now he knows that's all bullshit. He likes Richie. He… He has a crush on Richie. That's the reason. That's the answer to all of his questions. That's the reason Eddie can't stop thinking about the way Richie talks to him and touches him and smiles at him, even the way he teases him and mocks him. That's the reason he can't sleep at night because he can't allow himself to have the kind of dreams he's been having.

Bev says he shouldn't care that much. That's what she told him before leaving back with her Aunt, after giving him a speech about

love and freedom and rights and stuff. She's discovered feminism and thinks she can change the world now. Eddie thinks that's bullshit, at least from where he is right now. Maybe she can change the world but it has been clear that Derry is not part of the world. Derry is their own personal hell.

He'd like to talk to her, though, just because she's the only one who knows and it feels nice to feel normal even if it's just for a while, to hear some nice advice even if he won't follow them. He can't. His mom wouldn't allow him to talk to 'that dirty girl' on the phone. She's been warning him about girls a lot more now. Bad girls, dirty girls, girls who only want one thing, They'll get pregnant soon and catch good boys like you, Eddie-bear. Turn you against your own mother. Take you away. Make you her slave… Okay, she never said the last part, but to Eddie that's how it sounds. He wonders what his mom would think if she knew is not girls what she should worry about.

There's a sudden tap on his window. It's almost two in the morning but Eddie hasn't sleep yet. He'd be afraid, but he could recognize that tap anywhere. It not usual now, but it used to be when they were kids. Richie used to come at night, climb up his window, tap tap tap until Eddie opened up. He used to do it when he felt so alone at home he couldn't stand it anymore. Richie never said it, of course, but Eddie knew. So he opened up the window and let Richie in, sleeping together until morning, when Richie would climb down and ring Eddie's doorbell, pretend he's coming for Eddie to go to school together.

There was a time, after the clown, when Eddie just left the window open, just a tiny bit, and Richie would sneak in almost every night. He didn't need to say anything. They just hugged and slept and ease each other's nightmares. Back then Eddie never thought why or if that was okay or not. They were just two friends needing each other. Thinking about it now, it seems pretty obvious. It was a matter of time that he fell in love with Richie.

Eddie opens his eyes and his breath gets caught in his throat when there's a tap on the window again. In love. Fallen in love. Has he fallen in love?

He gets up when the tap becomes more insistent, opening the window and letting Richie in, looking at him with a blank expression. Fallen in love. Richie smiles and brushes off the dust from his clothes with his hands. Fuck, Eddie wants to kiss him. Is he stupid? Is he in love? Really??

“Hey, Eddie,” Riche says, and his smile fades a little after a while. “Is everything okay?” He asks. Does Eddie look pale? He feels pale.

“Sure. Is everything okay with you?” Eddie snaps back.

“Sure,” Richie shrugs, and there it is, his smile is back. “I’m tired as fuck.”

“You should sleep,” Eddie replies, and he moves almost automatically, opening one of his drawers and throwing some pajama pants at Richie. They’re too short for him, but whatever. It’s not like Eddie will buy bigger pants for when Richie decides to come sleep here. If he wants pants that fit him he should bring his own.

They don’t say much. Richie changes clothes, leaving his own scattered all over the floor, making Eddie wrinkle his nose. He looks kind of stupid wearing Eddie’s pajama pants, the hem an inch above his ankles, but Richie doesn’t seem to mind and Eddie doesn’t say a thing about it. They get in bed, turn off the lights, and that’s it. There’s nothing more. Two friends, sharing a bed, like a million times before.

“Did I wake you up?” Richie asks in a whisper, his breath hitting the back of Eddie’s neck. Eddie opens his eyes in the dark and closes them again, breathing deep. Using his inhaler right now would be really embarrassing.

“No,” he answers, and Richie makes an understanding noise, a new puff of breath hitting Eddie again. He wonders if it’d be too rude to ask Richie to stop breathing.

“Why were you awake?” Richie asks again, and Eddie just makes a face. Then he understands Richie can’t see him because: one, it’s dark, and two, he’s not facing him. So he speaks what he hopes his face had told.

“Thinking… things,” he says, hoping that’s enough. It seems not, because Richie speaks again.

“Bad things?” He whispers, and Eddie can feel the voice closer.

“Just things, Richie,” he answers. He sounds maybe more exasperated than he’d like, but he’s doing his best here. He should be freaking out and running away and finishing the whole stock of inhalers in the city, but he’s here, sharing his bed with… with whatever Richie is to him right now. He’s doing his best, he’d just like not to have to answer any questions about it.

“Okay,” Richie says, and Eddie breathes in relief, thanking mentally Richie is not pushy. He’s never been. That is until Eddie feels Richie’s arm around him, pulling him close to his chest, kissing the top of his head. “Do not worry your head, chuckaboo. Your darling Richie is always ready to shake a flannin for you. And he’ll cheer you up if you got the morbs,” Richie says in an awful British accent.

“Shut up, you idiot,” Eddie laughs quietly, and Richie chuckles against his hair, holding him closer to his chest.

That morning Richie climbs down Eddie’s window and rings the doorbell, asking Mrs. Kaspbrak if Eddie is ready for school. They both laugh when Eddie’s mom looks at them funny before they leave. Eddie feels like a fourteen-year-old again.

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Everybody is so excited, *so excited* for prom, Eddie is going to vomit. Not literally, of course. That would be disgusting. But he’s tired already of people talking about it, the theme, the music, what they will wear, who will they bring. Two girls have asked him if he’d go with them. Eddie was shocked. He never expected anyone to actually ask *him*. He said no, of course. He’s not going to prom. He knows better than to attend another party.

“What? Why?? You need to go!” Richie says during lunch. They all

have dates for prom already, all of them except Eddie.

“Eddie, i-if you don’t go y-you’ll regret it. It’s g-going to be fun, come on,” Bill insists.

“I’m not taking anyone to prom. I’m not dancing with anyone. And I definitely won’t go alone since you all dweebs have dates already.” He wouldn’t have minded going all of them together, or even just some of them, but he’s not going alone to prove he’s the biggest loser of the Losers.

“You should have asked some girl from Sunday mass. I bet they wouldn’t mind if you didn’t want to touch or dance,” Ben suggests. He actually has the nerve to suggest that.

“I must disagree…” Stan wrinkles his nose and looks away. “I know what is like to be told what you should and shouldn’t do with girls. And I’m touching as much as I can,” he adds, making everybody laugh.

“You c-could ask Bev-Beverly. You like her enough to d-dance with her and sh-she wouldn’t ask you to t-touch her if you d-don’t want to,” Bill says.

“Would you all leave me alone if I do that?” Eddie asks. He can ask Beverly, he doesn’t mind, mostly because he’s sure as hell she’ll say no. Nobody would come to Derry out of free will to attend some lame ass prom.

“You can at least try,” Stan says. Sure, he could try. He doesn’t want to but apparently what he wants doesn’t matter.

Eddie is starting to feel a bit uncomfortable around the Losers. He never thought this would happen, they’re his best friends, they love each other, but lately it’s like Eddie’s quirks are not so welcomed. Things they would just accept when they were kids now they need to be fixed. He knows they don’t mean harm, they do it because they think it’ll help Eddie. They’re trying to help a friend who has trouble interacting with girls. Only Eddie doesn’t have any problem with girls. Eddie just doesn’t…

He can't tell them. He can't even think about it, less saying it out loud. If he says it out loud, then it's real, it becomes real, and no one can escape from reality. And the guys, they're his friends, of course, but would they still be after Eddie told them? He knows what Derry thinks of people like him, he's seen the graffiti, he's flinched reading things like 'stick nails in eyes of all fagots (for God)'. Someone thought that, someone believed that hard enough to write it, and enough people agreed with it to let it be. Are his friends some of those people? Eddie doesn't know, but he can't risk asking.

Classes are over for today and Eddie is putting some books in his locker. He would usually hurry up just to catch the rest of the guys and go home together. Right now he feels his hands too heavy to hurry up, his shoulders too, so he's taking his time, and it has nothing to do with the fact that he's feeling like an outcast in his own group of friends.

"Hey, Eds!"

"Fuck!" Eddie jumps and shuts the locker door hard with a slam. "Do you want to give me a heart attack?? Don't laugh, asshole," Eddie complains while Richie just laughs even more, leaning against the lockers and looking at him. "If you're here to talk again about the damn prom I swear to God…"

"Actually, " Richie interrupts him, making a face, "I was thinking we could go together. You don't need to ask Beverly. I'm sure she'll say no anyway."

"You're going with fucking Sandra Paulmann," Eddie says, maybe more bitterly than he intended, so he tries to cover it up talking again. "Also, what the fuck? Is Bev too good for me now? Am I not enough for her?"

"You're perfect, dipshit, but she lives miles away. She's not coming, no matter who asks her, and you know that too, that's why you agreed to ask her. You're not fooling anyone. See? I was right. You're not saying anything 'cause I'm right. I caught you," Richie says with a satisfied smile. It's true, he caught him, but that's not the reason Eddie isn't talking back. The reason is the words 'you're perfect' playing on repeat inside Eddie's head. Richie stays silent for a second

too, looking at Eddie before he twists his lips, making a face. “I can ditch Sandra Paulmann,” he says shrugging, like it’s totally okay to do that.

“You wouldn’t. That’d be such an asshole move,” Eddie tries to sound disgusted, but it’s hard for him to hold back the smile that’s making its way out. Richie laughs and shrugs again.

“I would. I’m an asshole, everybody knows that.”

“No, you’re not. You’re a nice guy. Like, deep deep down,” Eddie jokes, and Richie leans in to whisper.

“Yeah, but that’s our secret.” Richie smiles at him, and Eddie can’t help smiling back. It’s one of those moments, like they say in books or in the movies. Just looking at Richie, smiling at Richie, feeling like, for just a second, it’s just them and nothing else. “Also you know how everybody’s talking about doing the nasty on prom night. I’m sure Sandra Paulmann wouldn’t have put out.” And that’s how you break a beautiful moment. Fucking Richie.

“Okay, I take it back. You’re an asshole,” Eddie frowns and looks back at his locker, opening the door again and putting in some more books. Richie laughs and gets even closer, looking over Eddie’s shoulder.

“No, what I mean is. Listen, this is actually pretty good,” Richie pokes at Eddie’s temple with his nose and that makes Eddie look at him, mostly because that way he can step back and put some space between them. Richie is smiling, one of those smiles he gets when he thinks he’s having the best idea ever. Eddie prepares for it. Richie’s best ideas ever are usually the worst. “I think we should fuck.”

“WHAT?” Eddie shrieks.

Okay, he wasn’t ready for that. He isn’t. He can’t. What the hell, Richie?? Eddie looks around just to check nobody heard them, his heart running so fast he feels it in his throat, trying to come out of his body, to run away from this stupid, crazy, out-of-his-mind friend he has.

“What? It makes sense. You’re not getting laid anytime soon and this town is not ready for my charms, I’m too much to handle, so I don’t see what’s wrong with us just, helping each other out.” Richie shrugs like it’s no big deal.

“You don’t see what’s wrong??” He can’t be hearing it right. This has to be a joke.

“Just two brothers helping each other out,” Richie says again. Eddie is about to have an aneurysm. He grabs Richie by his shirt and pulls him closer just so he can lower his voice as much as he can.

“Okay, first of all, don’t fucking say ‘brothers’ while talking about *fucking* ‘cause that’s disgusting. Also, it’s not my fault you’re not getting any, that’s just your ugly face. *Also*, you know shit about my sex life, like I could be running orgies every Wednesday morning and you—” Eddie stops and presses his lips tight together when Richie just starts chuckling.

“Sex life, like you have any of that, Eds. I’m sure you learned the word ‘orgy’ like yesterday. Also, my face is gorgeous.”

“Your face is the way nature has to prevent us from letting you reproduce. And don’t fucking call me that.”

“Ouch, you’re cold,” Richie brings a hand to his chest and fakes a hurt face that doesn’t work at all because he’s still laughing. “You’re lucky you’re such a cutie, ‘cause that attitude won’t take you far.”

“Shut the fuck up, Richie.”

“Yeah, okay, but what’s your answer?” Richie asks, and Eddie feels that twist inside his stomach again. He can’t possibly be serious. Richie looks at him and Eddie clenches his jaw, what makes Richie open a smug smile. “You haven’t said no yet.”

“Oh, do I need to say no? Isn’t it obvious?” Eddie answers. He sounds frustrated but the blush on his cheeks reveals there’s something else there too. Richie can see it, Eddie knows Richie can see it, and that only makes him blush even more, makes him more nervous.

“It isn’t,” Richie laughs, and he has that look on his face that says

he's having the time of his life torturing Eddie right now. "Come on, is not that hard. Just say no. Unless, of course, you don't want to say no."

"Fuck off," Eddie flips him off, his face now completely red, turning around and walking away as he hears Richie crack up laughing.

"You haven't said no yet!" Richie shouts to Eddie's back.

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That night Eddie stays awake in bed, looking at the window.

There's something, some weird feeling in his guts that tells him this has to be a joke, that Richie is just messing with him the way he always does. Richie always says stupid things, it's not new. On the other hand, though… It's Richie. And Richie always *does* stupid things. This thing in particular seems like a pretty stupid thing to do, so that totally fits Richie's ways.

"Would you actually do it? Like, do you mean it?" Eddie asks him while they're down in the Barrens, both of them sitting on the ground, leaning on a tree. They're all taking turns playing with Ben's new Game Boy. Nobody has beaten him at Tetris yet.

"Sure, Eds," Richie takes a cigarette to his lips, holding it between his index finger and his thumb and lighting it up, blowing out smoke with the cigarette still between his lips. "I think it'd be pretty sweet."

"But what if…" Eddie licks his lips and looks down at his own hands, lowering his voice even more. "Like, aren't you afraid of what people might think if they find out? Aren't you afraid it'll make you a…" He can't say the word. He can't say it out loud. He's so worried he even forgot to tell Richie not to call him Eds. Richie looks at him with a lopsided smile and lets out a puff of smoke.

"I'm not afraid of anything," he says, and Eddie chokes right there, moving his head away and coughing, pretending it's because of the

smoke and not Richie's words. Richie looks at him and chuckles a little, patting his back until Eddie can breathe properly again, reaching for Eddie's inhaler in Eddie's pocket and putting it between his lips. "Don't die, Spaghetti," he says and Eddie breathes deep, feeling his lungs expand. He mutters a soft thanks and looks at Richie. Richie looks back at him and takes a drag again, blowing the smoke away and putting the cigarette as far from Eddie as he can. "Eddie, do you li—. Um." Richie sighs and bites his bottom lip, frowning, but never taking his eyes off Eddie. "Do I gross you out?"

"No! No… I. No," Eddie laughs, scratching the side of his nose. "I mean, you're gross sometimes. Like, a lot of times. But you're… You don´t."

"Look, I'm just saying we could have fun. Just to, like, practice or something. So when the time comes and we're with a really nice gal we can perform like true…" Richie keeps talking but Eddie stops listening. He's too busy feeling his stomach drop to his feet to keep paying attention to Richie.

So that was it. Practicing. That's what Richie was proposing, to practice together so he could look like such an experimented lover the first time he was with a girl. Eddie feels disappointed, but not too much. After all, he never allowed himself to think this could mean anything else than Richie being Richie. What he's getting, though, is mad as fuck.

"… And it doesn't have to mean anything. I'd have asked any of the other guys, but they're hooked up already, and you… Eds?"

Eddie stands up and shakes the dirt off his jeans, walking away while he mutters "don't fucking call me Eds." He goes straight to Stan, taking the Game Boy from his hands and sitting on the ground next to the rest, ignoring Stan's protests. "My turn, assholes."

He doesn't talk to Richie for two whole days. He's not even avoiding him, he's just plain straight ignoring him. He wants Richie to know he's mad, even if Richie has no idea why. He feels like shit so at least he's having a laugh (internal laugh, that's it) seeing Richie lose his shit trying to figure out what's going on. When Bill asks Eddie what happened, Eddie just gives a loud groan for an answer, so the rest of

the guys know better than to ask too.

Of course, he can't keep that up for too long. They're all friends in the end and Eddie knows seeing Richie and him fighting makes the rest of them feel bad. Also is fucking uncomfortable hanging around together when two of them don't even look at each other. So Eddie knows he needs to figure out what to do, how to fix it.

That Saturday afternoon he starts walking to Richie's house without even thinking about it. Richie's mom opens the door and greets him with a smile, but doesn't really ask much and just says Richie is in his room.

Awesome.

"Okay, how?" Eddie asks the moment he opens Richie's bedroom door. Richie's leaning back in his chair, feet up on his messy desk, a guitar on his lap where he's trying some chords. Messy hair, messy clothes, messy room. He should probably work on being less of a fucking cliché. The asshole.

"So I guess you were having a conversation in your head and now you want me to participate too. I'm a genius, Eds, but I'm no fucking mind-reader. The fuck you mean 'how'?" Richie asks and Eddie is already mad. Or maybe he was mad even before coming here. He was mad at himself for even thinking about doing what he's about to do. He's always mad. He should take a pill for that too.

"You said you wanted to fuck. Okay. Let's fuck. But it was your idea so don't expect me to do all the job here just because your sorry ass —"

Eddie shuts up when Richie leaves the guitar aside and stands up, walking straight to him, frowning. He looks tall as fuck when he moves like that, and Eddie needs to take a step back because Richie is getting right in front of his face. It's time for Eddie to frown when Richie slams the wall behind Eddie with his hand, leaving it there. If Richie thinks that would intimidate Eddie he should think again. Eddie doesn't give a fuck if Richie is four inches taller than him, he's ready to throw a punch if he needs to.

“So first you tell me to fuck off for even suggesting it. Then you stop talking to me for t*wo whole days*. And now you come to my room without even knocking, like you own the place and start giving orders. And I’m supposed to just roll with it? What the fuck, Eddie?”

“I said okay, okay?! I just… I needed time! To think! Not everybody can be like you! Not everybody can…” Eddie lowers his voice and clenches his jaw. “Not everybody can think about doing it with another guy and just be cool, like it’s normal.” Richie looks at him and sighs, closing his eyes. When he opens them again, he’s not frowning anymore.

“But it is, stupid,” Richie smiles, lowering his voice too, leaning in to whisper in Eddie’s ear. “There’s nothing wrong with guys fucking guys. Is this town what’s wrong, but we already knew that, don’t we?” He leans back to look at Eddie. He’s right, Derry is wrong in a lot of ways, so that can be just another one. Eddie feels the heat creep up his cheeks and lowers his eyes. “So… do you want to?” Richie asks again.

“I guess…” Eddie says, but he doesn’t look up. He just shrugs, looking away. “I’m not going to college being a virgin…”

“I knew it!” Richie laughs, poking at Eddie’s nose with his finger. Eddie bats it off.

“Yeah, well, you are too so shut the fuck up.” He defends himself, feeling his cheeks get redder. Richie just looks at him, pressing his lips together in a thin line. He’s staring, and it’s making Eddie feel all self-conscious. “Well, what?”

“You told me to shut the fuck up.”

“Fucking— Ah, could I hate you more??” Eddie punches him on the chest, and Richie grabs his hands when he does, moving backward and making Eddie walk with him.

“I think so. I think you could hate me more,” Richie says, sitting on his bed and pulling Eddie with him. “I think you could hate me to the point where you don’t want this sorry ass to fuck you. In fact, you could hate me a lot more, Eddie. ‘Cause you love me.”

In a normal situation, Eddie would have a witty comeback ready. Is not that hard to find a clever reply to anything Richie says. Right now, though, while Richie puts a hand on Eddie's chest to make him lie down on his bed, Eddie would have trouble answering the question 'what's your name'.

"What are you doing??" He asks looking around, opening his eyes wide when Richie just pulls him closer, lying down by his side.

"What you came here for," Richie answers. He doesn't even use a suggestive tone, but his words are enough for Eddie to feel a little dizzy.

"Y-you mean n-now?" Eddie blinks fast and swallows.

Richie chuckles, "you sound like Bill," and Eddie wants to die. Or kill him.

"You're such a fucking…" Eddie tries to punch him wherever he can, but Richie just laughs and holds his wrist to stop the punches, pulling at them to get Eddie closer.

"Kiss me," he asks with a stupid smile on his face.

"Fuck no," Eddie spits out. He's red. He can't see himself but he's sure he's red as fuck. He must look like a fucking tomato right now.

"Fuck no? So, what? We're gonna fuck without kissing? What are you, a hooker?" Richie laughs louder when Eddie tries to knee him in the balls, shrinking into himself to protect his groin and grabbing Eddie's leg to put it around his waist, getting impossibly close. "Here. This is better, huh?"

The fuck is better. Eddie's heart is racing, his face is on fire, he can't breathe and he's fighting his body like never before trying not to get a boner right now because he could die if that happened. He's never been this close to Richie before, not face to face at least.

"Kiss me," Richie asks again.

"Wipe that shit-eating grin off your face before," Eddie huffs and Richie laughs again, clearing his throat and nodding.

“Okay. Okay,” he says, closing his eyes before his grin turns into a soft smile. When he opens his eyes again Eddie regrets asking him. A shit-eating grin Richie is his stupid friend Richie, the Richie he knows. This Richie, though… This soft and quiet and warm Richie is totally different. “Kiss me,” he whispers for the third time, and Eddie gulps before he hesitantly closes his eyes.

He’s shaking. He can’t help it. He’s so afraid of this he could faint, or throw up, or have a not-really-asthma attack. He frowns and clenches his jaw when he feels Richie’s lips close, not touching, but almost. They’re sharing breath and that’s it, it’s happening, it’s here. Eddie fists Richie’s shirt and holds him tight, like he could fall the moment their lips touch. It’s so soft at first, so chaste. But it’s enough. A light touch of Richie’s lips is enough for Eddie to know. What a stupid kid he was to think he could help himself from falling if he held Richie tight enough. He won’t fall now, he won’t. He’s fallen already.

Richie is the first to open his lips, to touch Eddie’s with the tip of his tongue, moving up a hand to cup Eddie’s face. They’re kissing. Fuck. They’re kissing. Jesus fucking Christ, Eddie wants to punch himself. His heart is trying to get out of his chest. God. He loves Richie so much.

“I had a smoke a few hours ago,” Richie whispers, not really moving away, just talking against Eddie’s lips. “I can go brush my teeth if I taste gross.”

“No,” Eddie says, and just kisses him again. No. Not now. If Richie leaves that bed right now Eddie will be too lost. He wouldn’t be able to handle all of this.

“Okay,” Richie nods. He nods and smiles and looks into Eddie’s eyes before he holds him tight, moving to lie on his back, getting Eddie on top of him.

It’s so warm, Richie is always so warm. Just being close to him makes Eddie feel the heat all around. When they’re chest against chest, Richie’s arms holding him tight, Eddie’s hands on Richie’s cheeks, the air gets so hot it’s almost dizzy. And his lips burn. Kissing Richie is like throwing himself into a volcano, dipping his tongue into Richie’s mouth, tasting mint and smoke and that hint of something sweet that

never fades. It makes Eddie's heart race like crazy. It makes him melt and get hard at the same time.

Fuck.

Richie must notice, of course he must, because he moves down one of his hands and pushes it between their bodies, biting his own lip and looking at Eddie when he touches him between his legs, cupping him. Eddie lets out a low 'fuck' and humps Richie's hand involuntarily, kissing him again, this time harder. No one has touched him there before, he hasn't even touched himself that much before, always afraid of thinking things he shouldn't think. He's not thinking them now, though. He's doing them. And it's making him shiver from head to toe.

"Do you like that?" Richie asks, low and soft against Eddie's lips, not even opening his eyes. It makes him blush, hearing Richie's voice like a reminder that this is him, this is them, and they're doing this. Eddie doesn't answer with words but he nods. He nods and moves and rubs himself against Richie's hand, letting out a soft, quiet moan. Richie laughs. "Now you know what your mom had—"

"Don't you fucking dare!" Eddie warns, opening his eyes huge and giving Richie a death glare while Richie just cracks up laughing. "I swear to God, Trashmouth, if you mention my mom one more time I'll kill you."

"Does trash taste good?" Richie asks with a smug smile, pulling Eddie down by his shirt, kissing him deeply. Eddie bites Richie's bottom lip hard when he pulls away, catching it between his teeth. "I think it must. You look eager for it."

"Beep-fucking-beep, Richie."

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

> I can't believe how much love this story is getting. Thank you, every one of you, for reading and leaving kudos and those awesome comments that make my day. I never thought I would go as far as I've gone writing this story, and it's mostly thanks to you and your support. So I just wanted to say that, and I hope you keep enjoying this like you've enjoyed it so far <3

So. They're doing it. They're doing this, whatever the fuck it is. They're not fucking, that's not what they're doing, because Eddie can't do that yet, but they're doing things together. They're…

"If you give me a hickey I'll cut your tongue," Eddie warns but he knows it won't work, not when his voice comes out all smooth and sickly-sweet. He hates himself but every time Richie kisses his neck he feels liquefied.

"You'd be the one who finally got me to shut up," Richie jokes, running his lips up Eddie's neck, biting his earlobe soft. "But I thought you liked when I talk."

He does. God help him, he does like when Richie Trashmouth Tozier talks. Not always, he's not that crazy, but when they're like this, when they're tangled together, feeling hot and messy, sharing sweat and breath, and all those things Eddie would have found disgusting just thinking about it. He likes when Richie talks to him, the same way he likes when Richie kisses him, touches him, bites him, kills him.

It's not even dirty talk, and that's surprising when it comes to Richie. Eddie would have expected some really bad dirty talk out of some equally bad porn movie. It's not like that, though, not at all. Richie doesn't even use bad words, not too much at least. He… He praises. He praises Eddie. He tells him how good he looks, how much he likes him, how bad he wants to touch him, kiss him, make him feel good. Eddie is only human.

"You're a fucking leech," Eddie jokes when he feels the pressure of Richie's lips below his ear. He doesn't stop him, though. His hair can cover that one, it doesn't matter.

"What can I say, my mouth can do a lot more things apart from talking," Richie moves to kiss Eddie's lips, looking at him and lowering his voice. "I'm pretty good at sucking, too."

Eddie blushes furiously.

No. They haven't done that yet either. They shouldn't do that at all, since this is supposed to be some kind of practice for when they get to be with a girl. It doesn't seem like practice to Eddie, but it won't be him who calls Richie on his bullshit this time, just in case it stops. Sadly, it won't be him who encourages Richie to keep it on, either. He's too much of a coward for it.

He'd like to answer something clever, something sexy. He'd like to say 'yeah? I don't believe you. Why don't you show me', something like that, but he feels embarrassed enough just thinking about it, there's no way he can get those words out of his mouth. So he just stays silent and waits for Richie to kiss him again, to touch him again.

"We're gonna be late for school," Eddie says when he takes a glance at his bedside clock. Richie just hums and kisses him one more time, and then once more, like he needs to keep Eddie's taste in his mouth before he can leave.

"See you downstairs," Richie finally says, tearing himself apart from Eddie and climbing down the window. Eddie looks at him go and sighs, falling back down on his bed.

He needs to get his shit together. It's been almost two weeks since Richie has been coming home every night, sneaking in, getting in his bed, making out and giggling like stupid until they're both too tired to keep doing it and just fall asleep. He can't keep feeling like his heart is about to burst every single time or he'll end up dying.

"That boy is at the door waiting for you again," his mom says, wrinkling her nose. "You know I don't like him, Eddie."

Eddie finds funny how his mom keeps calling Richie 'that boy' even when it's been years since she knows him.

"Don't worry, ma. Richie is harmless," he smiles and kisses her cheek, running down the stairs and greeting Richie, who's waiting at the door. "Bye, ma!"

"Bye, Mrs. K!" Richie says too, waiting until they're far from the door to smile at Eddie. "What you think she'd do if she found out I'm staying the night with you?"

"Kill you in your sleep. Or maybe kill me in my sleep and frame you," Eddie laughs, but he twists his lips when he thinks about it. "Maybe we shouldn't do it every day. I think she's starting to suspect."

"Oh. Oh, okay…" Richie looks ahead, pushing his hands into his pockets. "Well, then I'll go spend the night with another one of my lovers," he jokes, although there's something else in his voice.

"I meant you coming for me in the mornings, not… not the nights," Eddie says, just in case Richie misunderstood his words. "I like when you come at nights. I mean. It's… nice," he adds, and Richie opens up a wide smile.

"So you like when I come," he says, wiggling his eyebrows up and down. Eddie scoffs and shakes his head, rubbing his face with his hands.

"Why do I talk? Why do I try to say nice things?" He asks. Richie puts his arm around Eddie's neck, leaning on him and kissing his temple.

"Because deep, deep, *deep* down you know you like it. You love me, Eds," he says, and Eddie only needs to look at him for Richie to roll

his eyes, nodding. “Yeah, yeah, don’t call you Eds. Got it.”

*

Richie does ditch Sandra Paulmann, and she slaps him so hard across his face the whole school can hear it. She runs away crying and screaming something about guys being assholes and not finding anyone to go to prom on time now. Richie just stays there in silence for a few minutes, standing in place. Eddie feels a tight knot in his guts. It’s his fault. That girl being hurt and Richie being slapped, it’s all because of him.

“The hell did you do that for?” Stan asks when Richie finally comes back and sit with the rest of them. Richie just shrugs and sits by Eddie’s side but doesn’t really look at him.

“I got bored. I don’t feel like going with her anymore,” Richie says, picking some fries from Ben’s plate.

“Is it b-because of Eddie?” Bill asks, looking at both of them. Eddie looks sideways at Richie. There’s still finger marks on his cheek.

“Because of? No. Thanks to! Since Eds here is going all by himself, he gave me the courage to go by myself too!” Richie says with a smile.

“Now you two can go together,” Ben says, taking his plate away from Richie. He doesn’t sound like he’s joking, but Eddie is sure he’s not meaning it either. Or probably he means going together as friends.

“That sounds pretty sweet, actually. Don’t you think, Eds?” Richie asks, grinning at him. Eddie sighs and makes a resigned face.

“I guess I have no other option now…” He almost feels a little guilty for being so mean, but Richie just laughs like he always does, so Eddie allows himself to smile a little too.

He’s going to prom with Richie. Eddie can’t believe that’s really happening. It seems almost surreal except for the fact that they’re

talking about Richie, and nothing Richie does surprises anyone anymore, to be honest. It's like everybody knows Richie likes to do some crazy shit sometimes, and they also know Eddie is usually the one who suffers the consequences.

It's Stan the one who asks him what he's wearing to prom, and suddenly Eddie remembers he's supposed to dress properly for it. Eddie doesn't think it'd be that hard picking a suit. It's just a suit after all. The only choices he needs to make is wearing a tie or a bowtie. It's not like girls dresses, different in size, length, colors, shapes. Suits are easy.

"You say that because you have zero fashion sense. You should come with me if you don't want to end up looking like a door-to-door salesman."

"What's wrong with door-to-door salesmen?" Eddie asks. Stan rolls his eyes.

"I should've expected that from someone who used to wear a fanny pack."

Eddie decides he can't lose anything going with Stan. He calls Richie too, just in case he wants to come along. Maybe he doesn't know shit about fashion, but he's sure as hell Richie is not any better at it. At least Eddie's outfits, although a bit out of style, are well put together. They match, and that's more than you can say about Richie's clothes. Like, who the fuck wears Hawaiians shirts with rock band t-shirts?

"No way I'm going with you, Eddie! You can't see my dress until prom. It's a surprise," Richie says in a cheesy voice. For a moment, Eddie fears Richie will actually wear a dress to prom, although he bets Richie would manage to rock it anyway.

"We're going to prom, ass. We're not getting married," Eddie laughs and he feels really really *really* stupid when he feels the blush spreading on his cheeks. So stupid, God.

"Don't crush my dreams, Eds. You just go and have fun with Stan and get pretty for me. I'll see you t—" There's a crack on the line and Richie stays silent for a second. "Hi, Mrs. K. How are you doing?"

There's a huff and then some noise. A few seconds later, Sonia Kaspbrak speaks up.

"Eddie, dear. I need you to hang up, please. I have to make a call."

"Sure, ma," Eddie answers, and he stays silent for a second, waiting for his mom to hang up. She doesn't, though, Eddie can still hear her breathe, so he bites his lip and clears his throat. "I have to go, Richie. See you, um… See you tomorrow morning for school?" He asks, and he hopes Richie understands what he means.

"Of course, Eds," Richie says, and Eddie can hear his smile in his voice. "I'll be there. Bye, Eddie. Bye, Mrs. K."

Eddie hangs up and closes his eyes, preparing for what it's to come. Before he can't think too much about it, his mom is calling him downstairs. He knows what's going to happen, so he thinks about the answers he's going to give before even hearing the questions. He was joking, ma. I'm okay, ma. Nobody's corrupting me, ma. Richie is a good person.

"I just want the best for you, Eddie. And you should know…" She purses her lips, making a disgusted face. "Some boys are as dirty as girls."

*

He's so quiet that afternoon even Stan looks at him weirdly. Apparently there are a lot of options for guys too when it comes to prom suits. Tuxedos, blazers, 2-piece suits, 3-piece suits, blue, black, grey. Stan seems to enjoy the complex world of men clothing. Sadly, Eddie can't pay attention to him. He can't stop thinking about what his mom said.

Boys as dirty as girls. She was talking about Richie. Eddie never thought he would hear that about Richie. Dirty. Richie's not dirty. Richie's the farthest thing from dirty in this shithole they call a town. Richie may be bold, may not know when to shut up, and sometimes

can really get on people's nerves. But he never, ever, would harm a fly, he always tries to make people happy, just being with him, talking, joking, is enough to brighten anyone's day. Richie is not dirty. Richie is the purest being Eddie knows.

"Are you going to try any clothes at all?" Stan looks at him, crossing his arms. Eddie looks at him and sighs.

"Can't I just, I don't know, rent one? Like anyone. You can pick it for me."

"No, Eddie! I can't pick it for you. Also you're short, so you'll probably need it to be tailored!" Stan huffs exasperated. "Is it that hard to pay a bit of attention?" He asks, and then he frowns, looking at Eddie. "Is this because of Richie?"

"What??" Oh, that got his attention right away, for sure.

"I don't think I need to tell you, 'cause I suppose you know, but if Richie is bothering you with all this going together to prom thing… just tell him. You know how he doesn't see when he's gone too far sometimes."

"Do you think he's gone too far?" Eddie asks. He's nervous about the answer, but he wants to know. If Stan has thought Richie was being problematic it means he's seen something. Eddie wants to know how much he would be exposing himself to the world.

"I don't know… I mean, it's not like he's really taking you…" Stan wrinkles his nose, looking at Eddie. "Like, I know Richie and I know he's probably just doing it for laughs, but I can see how it might get you uncomfortable all this pretending to be taking you to prom."

"Doing it for laughs?"

"Yeah, you know. Since you didn't want to go with a girl… Although I think you still have time to find a proper date."

Eddie doesn't know what makes him madder, Stanley thinking Richie asking him to prom can't be serious at all or the possibility of that thought being right. It must show on his face because Stan keeps talking, maybe trying to fix it and maybe making it worse. Eddie is

not in the mood to hear anything else, so he starts looking at those stupid suits already. He came here for it, didn't he?

He ends up getting a rosedust pink suit, no matter the weird looks he gets at the store. He's not going to wear a typical black suit because darker colors never suited him, and he's used to the looks anyway, he's been getting them at school every time he's worn one of his pastel polo shirts. He's gotten beatings for it. He's been called a sissy, a fag, a queer…

So what? Huh? What if he is? What if he's all of those things and he's tired of giving a fuck? It's not like hiding is making things any better. Everybody is calling him a fag already and acting based on that except for him. Well, maybe he should start acting like it too.

The guys always say Richie is the one who does crazy shit, but that's because they don't really know Eddie. Eddie can be as crazy as Richie. Fuck, Eddie can be crazy as shit. Even if he knows he will regret it later. He's really angry with the world right now and rage is the best fuel for him.

He doesn't even pay that much attention to his mom that night at dinner, and that gets him an early visit to his room. "You disappoint me, Eddie-bear. You need to learn how to be a good boy to your mother. Go to your room, and don't even think of using the phone. I'd know." Eddie wonders if she'll spend the night with the phone on her ear, waiting to hear a crack on the line.

Being sent to his room is not that bad, he's got his comic books and his music. He thinks about putting on one of Richie's cassette tapes, but he doesn't want his mom coming upstairs asking him to turn down that noise from hell. At least now she's more tolerant when Eddie listens to black artists, her hate is directed towards rock music now. Eddie suspects Richie's t-shirts have something to do with that.

Speaking of Richie, Eddie's getting impatient. He was supposed to come tonight and Eddie's been waiting since forever, the window already open, but Richie's nowhere to be seen. He'd like to call him on the phone and ask him why the fuck he's taking so long. He was feeling so brave before and now he's just feeling stupid. The only thing he can do is keep reading his comics, but he's turning the pages

so roughly he almost rips one off.

“Hey, Rapunzel,” Richie’s voice startles Eddie, and he jumps off the bed, walking barefoot to face Richie.

“What the fuck took you so long, I should punch you,” Eddie reproaches him. Richie just laughs when Eddie grabs him by his t-shirt.

“What? Eds, it’s—“ Eddie doesn’t want to hear him, so he just pulls him down and kisses him. Richie holds Eddie’s face immediately, kissing him back. He licks his lips and swallows when he pulls apart, looking at Eddie and breathing harder now. “What? What is it? It’s the same hour as every night, Eds.”

“Don’t call me Eds,” Eddie says back, pushing Richie to the nearest wall, almost tiptoeing to keep kissing him. He’s not thinking when he reaches down to Richie’s jeans, unbuckling his belt. Or maybe he is thinking, maybe he’s thinking clearer than ever before in his life.

“Fuck. Eddie. What…” They kiss again, and Eddie bites Richie’s bottom lip hard as he gathers the courage to drop to his knees. “Fuck. *Fuck*, Eddie?”

“Shut up.” Eddie doesn’t need him talking right now. He needs to concentrate. His hands are shaking but he’s not going to stop.

“Eddie, are you…” Richie bumps his head against the wall when Eddie puts his mouth on him. “Fuck. *Eddie*. Are you sure?”

Eddie doesn’t answer, but he proves it. He’s sure. He’s absolutely sure.

*

When Eddie closes his eyes that night, his head resting on Richie’s chest, his arms around him, he feels at peace. He can still taste Richie in his mouth. Eddie doubts he’ll ever forget that taste, that feeling,

the way Richie was shaking under his hands. He hugs Richie tighter when he feels one of Richie's hands moving up and down his back, touching lightly across his spine, using just the tip of his fingers, making Eddie shiver.

He looks up at Richie only to meet his eyes looking back at him. The lights are off, so Eddie can't see too well, but Richie looks mesmerized, like he's paying attention to every one of Eddie's features.

"Have you been looking at me in the dark like a creep all this time?" Eddie asks, and Richie just chuckles and nods.

"Creep is my middle name," Richie says, but then he frowns. "No, wait. Trashmouth is my middle name. Maybe Creep is my third name. Maybe I'm like one of those wealthy dudes with a lot of names."

"Richie Trashmouth Creep Tozier III," Eddie laughs, but Richie shakes his head in disagreement.

"Fuck no, I'm the first of my name. And the last. I'm one of a kind."

"Well, that's true," Eddie agrees, and he moves to peck Richie's lips, only Richie puts a hand on the back of his neck, keeping him in place and kissing him properly, deeper. Richie breaks the kiss but doesn't let Eddie go. He just keeps looking at him, looking at his lips. "What?"

"Nothing, just. You taste like… me," Richie says, making Eddie blush furiously. "It's cute," he chuckles.

"Shut up," Eddie hides his face on Richie's neck, but he laughs too. "How can that be *cute?*"

"I don't know. Everything you do is cute," Richie shrugs, and he pokes at Eddie's head with his nose, making him look up again. "So. I was thinking. My parents aren't home this weekend. Dad has a convention and mom is going with him," he says looking at Eddie, twisting his lips. "I think you should come."

The weekend. The whole weekend. It won't be easy to convince his

mom he'll be out for the whole weekend. Eddie looks at Richie and closes his eyes, snuggling closer to him.

"I'll go," he says. He doesn't know how, but he'll do it. He'll go.

*

A couple of people are already planning after prom parties, and the guys have been debating where to go because they want to meet Mike after prom and they'd like to have a good time at a safe place. Nobody wants their prom night ruined by some racist asshole. The only reason they're being invited is because of Bill and Ben, anyway. They might have gotten more popular over the years, but the rest are still pretty much outcasts. Bill stopped stuttering so much and Ben wasn't fat anymore, but Stan was still Jewish, Richie was still a weirdo, and Eddie was… well, what they said.

"I think Laura D-Dixon's party would be great. S-she's nice and she wouldn't mind Mike coming," Bill says. Eddie knows Laura, they're in some class together, he doesn't remember which one. She's never been mean to him, but then again, she's never really talked to him at all.

"What about Cassie Jones? She's not that bad," Ben says, and some of the guys laugh.

"Yeah, except for how her boyfriend and his friend tried to fuck up my truck just a week ago," Mike says, shaking his head.

"You just want to go 'cause her house is huge and has a lot of rooms," Stan says, and the guys laugh again. Richie takes his wallet and opens it, getting a condom from it and throwing it at Ben's face.

"Get some or get none!" Richie says, trying to sound like some condom ad.

"I'm keeping this, just so you know," Ben laughs, picking up the condom and looking at it. "Pink? Why is it pink?"

“Strawberry flavored,” Richie waggles his eyebrows up and down. “I also have those glowing in the dark ones, so I can have lightsaber duels,” he adds, thrusting with his hips.

“L-Lightsaber duels?” Bill laughs, looking at Richie. “With whom?”

“With you, Billy, of course!” Richie laughs too, throwing himself at Bill and trying to hump him while Bill pushes him away.

“Isn’t Stephanie Mellon throwing a party? She always does, her house is big too, and she’s not friends with pieces of shit,” Eddie asks, but Mike shakes his head, lowering his eyes.

“Nah, man. I don’t think she’d be in the mood for that…” Mike says, and Eddie frowns. Did something happen?

“Her brother died last week. She’s not going to prom either,” Ben adds, looking down too. Eddie looks at Richie. Richie, however, doesn’t look back at him. He’s just looking away, at nowhere.

“He was the fag, right?” Richie asks suddenly, and all the guys gasp at the same time.

“What the fuck, Richie?” Bill asks, frowning. All of them are looking at Richie now.

“Yeah, what the fuck, Richie?” Eddie asks too. Richie chuckles, reaching for his cigarettes and taking one to his lips, lighting it up.

“What? You’re gonna get all respectful now? Now that he’s dead?” Richie shakes his head, taking a drag and blowing the smoke away. “Man, I hate that. I hate all that bullshit, no speaking ill of the dead. What can he do with that now? Being respectful now is useless for him, he’s dead. People should shove their respect up their asses.”

“We n-never said bad things about him when he w-was alive either, Richie,” Bill responds, but Richie just twists his lips.

“But you thought about it. Everybody thought about it. Everybody said it, spit it to him, like, *fucking literally*. People said it so much he couldn’t fucking escape from it. And what did he do?” Richie laughs nervously, shaking his head and taking another drag. “He fucking

owned it. Everybody called him a fag, so he called himself a fag. I. I heard him say it, fucking proud of it. I'm a fag, so what?" Richie looks at Eddie for a second and presses his lips tight, clenching his jaw. "Fucking bravest person in this whole hellhole we call a town." He stands up, looking disgusted. "So you can keep your respect to yourself. I'm sure he would have spit on it."

Richie takes a step forward, and he looks like he's leaving, but Mike stands up suddenly, stopping Richie with his whole body and fisting his t-shirt, looking at him dead in the eye.

"Listen, *Trashmouth*," he stresses the nickname, seething. "I'm gonna let this pass 'cause we all know your brain-to-mouth filter is shit, but hell if I'm gonna let you decide what I think or what I thought about Adrian. You didn't know him. I did. You don't give a fuck about him. I do. And maybe he called himself a fag, but for now on you're not gonna say that word in front of me. You hear me?"

Richie doesn't answer. He doesn't say a thing, he just stares at Mike. He still looks pissed off, but there's something else on his face as his eyes start welling up.

"Let me fucking go, Mike," Richie says through his teeth, his voice sounding kind of broken. Mike looks at him and pulls him closer, pursing his lips before talking.

"I don't know what's your problem, but you should fix it."

Mike lets him go with a contained shove, and Richie just walks away, putting on his headphones and shoving his hands in his pockets. Eddie stays where he is, afraid of even moving.

*

There's probably some good in this world, because Eddie still doesn't know how he managed to convince his mom to let him stay at Richie's when his parents aren't home. It's not like it'd be that different than when they are home, Richie's parents are always like

shadows. Once Eddie asked Richie how he did it to sneak out every night without his parents noticing. He said he just walked out the front door, his parents never asked where he was going. But Eddie's mom is different, she's the total opposite, so Eddie has to convince her that everything will be okay, bringing a lot of medicines, an emergency kit, and every services number possible: police, fireman, doctor's office, etc. He maybe lies a little, too.

"Of course there'll be adults to check on us, ma. You think Richie's parents would leave him home alone?" He laughs and kisses her cheek. "Also I'll call you every morning and evening. It's just two days, you're not gonna miss me that much."

"Of course I will, Eddie. I miss you already," she kisses him too, waving her hand goodbye. "Be careful, Eddie-bear. I love you."

"Love you too, ma!" He closes the door and smiles. He's free.

He rides his bike to Richie's like the big loser with no car that he is, but he doesn't care. He likes feeling the wind on his face. Also if he had a car he'd be at Richie's in a second. Riding a bike gives him time to think, although maybe that's not that good.

Richie's been a little weird since the fight with Mike. He keeps joking and laughing like he always does, but there's something different about him. Sometimes he just stares at nothing, or he misses a really good opportunity to make a joke, and when he does joke, his smile never reaches his eyes.

"You remember I was coming, right?" Eddie smiles when Richie opens the door. Richie takes his hand and pulls him inside.

"Like I could forget."

Somehow Eddie was expecting Richie to kiss him right there, so he feels a little disappointed when it doesn't happen. Richie just tells him about his plan, how he rented some movies, bought some frozen food although they can order pizza if Eddie is in the mood, and cleaned up his room so Eddie doesn't have a heart attack.

"I guess I could get a TV for my room," Richie says when they go

there to leave Eddie's bag. It's true, Richie cleaned up, and now it looks like a totally different place. "But I'm not here that often, so…"

"It's okay, I don't mind watching the movies in the living room," Eddie says, smiling at him.

"I've got tons of popcorn to make up for it."

"You know how to make your way into a man's heart," Eddie says, and they both laugh.

They watch Terminator and RoboCop, and Richie makes a huge bowl of popcorn for both of them, adding a big coke bottle to the mix. They watch the movies while they eat and make comments, laughing and saying stupid shit, putting their feet up on the table. Richie tries to make all the voices and some of them are pretty good. The end up ordering pizza in between movies, and they're having so much fun Eddie doesn't even think about the mess they're making and how his mom would get livid if she saw it.

There's something he's thinking about, though, and it's how Richie hasn't touched him yet. Not literally, of course, Richie has touched him, his hands, his arms, things like that, but… He's just touched Eddie in a friendly way. In fact, now that Eddie thinks about it, Richie hasn't touched him in a different way since what happened with Mike. Eddie is starting to wonder if whatever they had is over.

"Do you have any other movie? I'm not that tired yet," Eddie asks, standing up from the couch and looking through Richie's tapes. He is tired, but he's more afraid. He's afraid of going to bed with Richie and sleeping back to back.

"Suit yourself," Richie says, lying down on the couch, using some cushions as a pillow. "Don't mind me if I fall asleep."

"Who are you and what have you done with my friend Richie?" Eddie jokes, going back to the couch and sitting down. He looks at Richie and feels anxious, not know what he's allowed to do anymore. "Can I lie down too?"

"You're so stupid," Richie laughs, putting his arm around Eddie's

waist and pulling him down with him, close to his body. Eddie's sigh of relief can be heard the moment his back presses against Richie's chest, and he smiles. This is better. Not the best, but definitely better. "Which one did you choose?"

"Dead poets society. I haven't seen it before," Eddie says, although he doesn't really care about the movie right now.

"It's a good one. You'll like it."

He does. Richie was right, is a good movie, maybe too good. It's making Eddie think. All those speeches about looking at life in a different way, about making your life extraordinaire, living it on your own terms. Carpe diem. It's making Eddie think about what he wants to do right now and why he's not doing it. Is it because of himself or is it because of others? The answer is not that simple. It is because of others, sure, but also because of himself, because he's a coward. But then again, he's a coward because of what others might think of his true desires.

His heart starts beating faster before Eddie knows he's decided to do something about it, like his body knows what he needs to do before he realizes. He takes a deep breath once and then again. He can't get an asthma attack, a panic attack, a whatever the hell he gets sometimes. No. He needs to do this right.

"You okay, Eds?" Richie asks, and Eddie turns his head up to look at him.

"I'm good," Eddie says, swallowing, licking his lips. It's now or never. "Yeah, I'm… I'm great."

He can't believe it. While he closes the distance between them and kisses Richie's lips, he can't believe he's actually doing it. He's shaking, like this is the first time, like they haven't done this a hundred times before. But now it's different. It feels different. It takes a while before Richie kisses back, Eddie almost moves away and says he's sorry, but then Richie's hand is on the back of his head, they're shifting, moving, and when Richie kisses him it's like fucking fireworks.

The movie keeps playing in the back, but none of them could care less. Eddie has to bite back a moan when Richie gets between his legs, feeling him so hot it burns. Richie's kisses become desperate, rough, using teeth and tongue, and pushing carefully with his thumb on Eddie's chin to make him open his mouth.

Eddie is starting to feel dizzy when Richie moves away, looking at him, the sweat making his curls stick to his forehead.

"I'm gonna take my shirt off," Richie says, and it's not a question but it sounds like Eddie could say no and Richie would accept it.

"Take everything off," Eddie laughs nervously, but he's not joking. He might be nervous and a little bit scared, but this is Richie and never in his life Eddie has felt braver than when he's with Richie. Richie laughs, though. He takes his shirt off, throws it away, and laughs, moving back down to kiss Eddie again.

"You don't know what you're saying, Eds," he whispers, leaving soft kisses up Eddie's neck, shifting to catch his lips too.

"I know," Eddie replies, returning the kiss and speaking again. "I do know what I'm saying. And if you want to…" The rest of the words get stuck in his throat when Richie stops and looks at him, a mix of feelings showing in his eyes. Eddie swallows and closes his eyes. If he hesitates now Richie will back up, he's sure of that. "Do you… have more of those you gave to Ben?" He asks, and he can feel his ears get red. He must be red all over.

"In… They're in my room," Richie breathes out, and Eddie can feel against his stomach the reaction in Richie's body. "Do you… Are you…"

"Yeah. Yeah, Richie, let's… Let's go," Eddie nods frantic, keeps nodding when Richie nods too, and he would keep nodding if Richie didn't kiss him hard, deep, biting his lips.

Eddie doesn't even know how they get there. They're all shaking hands unbuttoning clothes, pushing, pulling, sharing breath and gasps when their skins touch, a mess of limbs when they fall on the bed. Eddie fists Richie's curls when Richie runs his lips across his

chest, down his stomach, twisting and turning when he feels kisses and bites at the same time. He doesn't want to say please because he knows Richie wouldn't let him live it down, but he wants to. He wants to say please, and yes, and there, and…

Richie moves up to look at him, giving him a quick peck on the lips before he reaches for his bottom drawer, getting a couple of things. Eddie feels a shiver running down his spine and he gets goosebumps. It's happening.

"This is, uh…" Richie points to what it looks like a bottle of Vaseline. "I don't want to hurt you. So I use this to make nut lube. I mean, for my guitar, it's not… I do it myself. I use this jelly and sandpaper and… I'm not gonna use sandpaper on you, I…"

"Well this is new," Eddie chuckles, and he sees how Richie's cheeks start to get red. "Richie Tozier is at a loss for words," he says, and Richie drops his head, hiding his face with his hair, but Eddie can see he's smiling. "It's okay… but who said it would be you the one to…"

"Oh! No, I mean. It can. It can totally be you, like," Richie takes the condom and puts in on Eddie's chest. "Pink really suits you," he says, and they both laugh like stupid.

"Strawberry flavored?"

"Wanna taste it?"

"No, I want it inside." Eddie opens his eyes big after the words leave his mouth. He can't believe he just said that, but his whole body is responding like that was exactly what he wanted to say.

"Fuck, Eds," Richie shivers and moves back down to kiss him. "Warn a man before you say those things."

Eddie laughs on Richie's lips and kisses him, keeps kissing him while he feels Richie's hands move, doesn't stop kissing him when he hears the condom wrapper tear. He's shaking. They both are. And when Eddie feels Richie's fingers covered in the oily substance his heart is pumping so hard and fast, so loud in his ears, Eddie almost can't hear anything else.

“Tell me, okay? Tell me if it hurts. Tell me if—“ Richie talks desperate, and Eddie has to kiss him hard to make him shut up. It hurts. It does, but he’s not stopping. Not now. Fuck pain, he’s had it worse.

Relax. If years of visiting the doctor have made him something is an expert on the human body, so Eddie knows the best way to ease the pain, this sort of pain, is to stop fighting it. So he allows himself to just feel, Richie touching him, Richie kissing him, Richie’s skin on his skin, his hands, his fingers, his lips, his… Richie inside him. So deep inside him.

“Eddie. Eddie,” Richie is trembling, his lips red and shiny, his chest moving up and down. He pushes Eddie’s hair off his face and behind his ear, kisses his soft on the lips. “Tell me you’re okay,” he asks, and Eddie just nods. He can’t say anything. He’s too overwhelmed. “Yeah? I’m not hurting you?” He rests his forehead on Eddie’s, starting to move back as Eddie shakes his head no. It doesn’t hurt. Not really. Not anymore. “Do you like it?” Richie whispers, and Eddie feels his cheeks get red and his body melt before he can say yes. Yes. Jesus fuck, he likes it so much.

Richie starts moving then, catching Eddie’s lips between his and not letting them go while he sets a rhythm. Eddie digs his nails into Richie’s back, the feeling getting more and more intense as his body get used to it. Richie looks at him, touches his face, and for a second he looks like he’s watching something sacred. “Get on top of me, do it,” Richie asks, but he moves himself, bringing Eddie with him. “Like that, baby. Do what you want, what you need. I’m yours, Eddie.” And Eddie has to kiss him again because Richie needs to shut up.

They move against each other, they don’t stop moving. It’s so hot in there, in the room, in bed, inside. They’re sweating, Richie’s curls sticking to his face, the sheets clinging to their bodies, wrapping them like Richie’s arms around Eddie, like his hands on Eddie’s back, his fingers on Eddie’s hair, and his eyes. Fuck’s sake, his eyes.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Eddie says and he closes his eyes. He closes his eyes because Richie’s ones are too much. Just too much.

“Why?” Richie asks, breathy and soft, his hands running up and

down Eddie's back. Their noses bump and Richie kisses him even when Eddie hasn't answered his question yet. He kisses soft and deep and hot. "Why, Eddie?" He asks again right against Eddie's lips, so he can feel Richie's moving.

"Just shut up," he asks. No. He begs. It's too much. He pushes his fingers through Richie's hair and pulls, grabbing him tightly, kissing him rough and hard, biting his mouth and making Richie pant.

"Eddie," Richie whispers, holding him tighter, making Eddie clench his jaw when he thrusts deeper because they can't make too much noise. It feels so good it makes him shiver, getting goosebumps all over his skin.

"Shut up and do that again." It shows in his voice, the way he's feeling, the way he's melting. Richie does it again, he obeys and Eddie needs to kiss him once more just to stop the noises from coming out. He kisses and kisses and kisses even more. And when he breaks apart and looks at Richie, something gets stuck in his throat. And he thinks 'fuck' because he can't say it out loud.

Richie doesn't stop, holding him in place, touching his face, looking at him, moving faster when both of their bodies start feeling electric, overcharged, ready to combust. Richie puts a lock of hair behind Eddie's ear and bites his bottom lip, letting out a soft chuckle and breathing deep.

"I think I love you, Eds."

"Don't call me—"

What.

What did he just say?

Notes for the Chapter:

Do you guys think I should change the rating to Explicit? Because that wasn't explicit for me, but I'm European and we don't really consider something sexual explicit or rated R unless is literally pornographic, so you tell me. Your wish is my command.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

> Thanks again, guys, for all your love and support. I hope you enjoy reading this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Eddie Kaspbrak is a fag.

Eddie Kaspbrak is a queer.

Eddie Kaspbrak is a loser.

But, above that all, what Eddie Kaspbrak is, is a fucking coward.

He's such a coward. He's such a fucking coward.

His mom was really happy when he came home that weekend before he was expected. Eddie knew he only needed to say he wasn't feeling okay and his mom would be calling the doctor right away. He wasn't lying anyway, he wasn't feeling okay at all. Eddie always hated going to the doctor with his mom, because that meant hours and hours of useless tests, but right then that was exactly what he needed.

He had a fever but the doctors couldn't find the cause, and Eddie didn't say a word even when he knew the reason. Eddie looked so ill the doctors actually paid attention to him this time, not like most of the times his mom has brought him there. They finally said the only thing they could do was waiting, so Eddie should rest in bed for a week and see if he'd get better. Or worse. His mom was so worried on the way back she cried the whole time.

Eddie felt like shit scaring his mom like that, making her remember everything that happened to his dad. He would like to say 'it's not

that, ma, I'm not dying, not literally at least' but then he wonders what will happen if his mom knew the truth, if that would make her stop crying or that'd make her cry even more.

Bill comes to visit. Stan too. Eddie knows the rest would come too, but Bill and Stan are the only ones his mom allows home. He gets better after a day or two but his mom insists he takes the whole week off. Eddie knows Richie is calling often because he can hear his mom downstairs on the phone making up excuses. He's so insistent even she's feeling sorry for him, so she ends up asking Eddie if he wants to come on the phone. He doesn't. Just knowing Richie is calling is enough for him to feel a twist in his gut and a knot in his throat. He just can't.

"So y-you're coming back n-next week? Bill asks, sitting on the edge of Eddie's bed. "We all miss you."

"I could have gone yesterday already, but my mom wouldn't let me," Eddie sighs, and they both laugh at it. Bill purses his lips, looking away for a second.

"You know, R-Richie is worried about you. He thinks… He thinks you don't wanna t-talk to him. I told him i-it's probably just your mom," Bill makes a face and smiles a little. "Everything's okay, right?"

"Sure, everything's fine," Eddie nods, but Bill doesn't seem too convinced. "For real, just… I'll talk to him at school."

He doesn't want to, but he knows he'll have to do it anyway.

*

A part of him, a tiny little part of him really expected Richie to act normal the next day of school. Of all scenarios that played in Eddie's head, his favorite was one where he arrived to school and Richie just came to him, teasing him like always, joking about his mom, trying to gross him out with some stupid story. In that scenario everything was fine, Richie was still his friend, Eddie hadn't broken his heart.

It would be so easy, just showing up and act like every other day of his life, laugh and joke and talk about stupid things. Even the total opposite would be easier too! If Eddie came to school and Richie just approached him and punched him in the face and told him he doesn't want to see his ugly face anymore. Yeah, that would be easy too, more painful for sure, but easy.

But no, of course not, Eddie never had it easy in his life, why would this be different. When he finally gets to school that morning he's so tense he feels like there's a string attached to his head pulling up at him. He never had too much faith but he finds himself asking God please don't make this day too hard for him. He even tries not to look around too much, just keeps his eyes on his own things, his books, his hands.

Richie catches his eyes the moments he comes to the scene, and once Eddie is looking at him he just can't look away. They're not too close, but they're close enough to Richie notice him too. Eddie waits for a few seconds, thinking maybe Richie would come closer, talk to him, act like nothing happened. He doesn't. Richie just stays there, standing in place, looking at him. It's Eddie's turn to go to him. It's Eddie the one who fucked up, it's him who owns Richie some excuse for his behavior. But he's a coward, didn't he say that already? It's Eddie the first to look away, closing his locker and walking to class.

He feels like he's going to be sick the rest of the day.

For a second he thinks about skipping lunch, but Ben sees him in the hallway and Eddie can't run away. Walking to the cafeteria feels like walking the green mile. It's just Stan there when they sit at the table, but Eddie knows it's a matter of time the rest will join them.

He can hear Richie before he sees him, talking loudly and laughing with Bill, and Eddie almost wants to smile because he's missed that laugh so much. He feels something bitter dripping down his throat when he realizes it won't be him the one who makes Richie laugh like that anymore.

"Guy, guys," Bill calls for attention when he sits down. "Guess who f-finally got his old man's car all for himself?" He asks, poking at Richie with his elbow while Richie just laughs.

“No shit, the Mustang Mach 1??” Stan opens his eyes wide. “What a motherfucker!”

“It’s a rattletrap, that shit is older than me…” Richie says with half a smile. “But he said: if you make it work it’s yours, so…”

“Shut up, I hate you so much right now,” Stan shakes his head in disbelieve.

“You need to n-name her,” Bill says, and Richie makes a concerned face, putting his hand on Bill’s shoulder.

“Billy, you’re my best friend and I love you, but you’ve got a weird thing going on with calling things by girls names,” Richie says and everybody laughs. Eddie would lie if he said he didn’t feel a twist in his stomach hearing Richie say ‘I love you’.

“It’s practical, man. Would you rather say you’re riding your car home or you’re riding Betty home?” Ben asks, and the guys laugh again.

“Well, I don’t know you, Haystack, but I rather say Betty is *riding me* home,” Richie says back, wiggling his eyebrows and making the boys crack up laughing. “I’m a pretty smooth ride, Haystack, wanna try?”

“No, thank you. Thanks. But no,” Ben laughs along with the rest. Eddie hears them far away, though. His heart is beating so fast and loud it’s hard to hear anything else.

He tries to pay attention to his food, poking at his cardboard pizza before taking a bite. He puts some corn on the next bite, just to change the taste a little. At least the pineapple jelly tastes like some chemical fruit, not pineapple, but some fruit.

“Eddie. Eddie!” Stan hits him on the forehead with the back of his hand.

“You do that again and I’ll stab you in the eye,” Eddie says immediately, threatening Stan with his plastic fork.

“We’re talking to you, fucknut,” Stan says, trying to hit him again, laughing when Eddie bats his hand off and tries to stab him with the

fork. “We’re naming Richie’s car. What do you think we should name it? Her. Whatever, Bill,” Stan corrects before Bill can say anything.

“I think you should name it ‘leave-Eddie-the-fuck-alone’, it’s a beautiful name,” Eddie says, “and maybe ‘or-he’ll-stab-you-in-the-eye’ for the middle name? Yeah, that’d be perfect.”

“Have you seen my new baby, Leave-Eddie-the-fuck-alone Or-he’ll-stab-you-in-the-eye Tozier? She’s beautiful,” Ben says, making a face and laughing. “No, I don’t think it’d work.”

“I think it’s cute,” Richie says, and Bill looks at him in disbelieve.

“Cute? How is t-that cute?”

“It has Eddie’s name on it, of course it’s cute,” Richie answers, and the guys groan and roll their eyes. Eddie tries to laugh too, but it gets stuck in his throat.

“Of course,” Stan mocks him. “Anyway, you can always shorten it to Eye-stabber. *That* sounds cool.”

“Oh, Stan, you’re a genius! I could kiss you right now!” Richie says, trying to reach Stan, but Stan pushes him back with a hand on Richie’s face.

“Yeah, yeah, leave that for Eddie too,” he says and everybody laughs again. Richie looks at Eddie, but Eddie can’t read his eyes. He looks away before he can catch anything.

The guys keep talking, changing topics, and Eddie tries to keep up with the conversation although it’s too hard for him not to drift into his own thoughts. Richie never talks directly to him, but sometimes Eddie feels Richie’s eyes looking in his direction.

Lunch is over and they all go back to class. Eddie tries not to linger on, the faster he gets to the classroom the safer he’ll be from Richie’s look. He walks fast to his locker, picking up the things he needs and closing the metal door. He moves so fast he crashes against someone.

“Sorry, I…” he mutters, trying to walk past the person, but a hand on his chest stops him.

“You’re Eddie Kaspbrak, right?” A nice but firm voice asks. When Eddie looks at the source of it, he sees a dark-haired girl looking back at him. “Hi, I’m Kay Addams. I’d like to talk to you.”

*

“I can’t believe you really rented a fucking limo,” Richie laughs, but Ben doesn’t seem affected. He seems fucking proud, in fact.

“I’m a gentleman,” Ben says, looking at the guys. “Also I don’t have a car, so you tell me what else could I do, pick up my date and go to prom riding my bike?”

“I bet that’d be something she wouldn’t forget,” Richie laughs, and the rest of them too.

“Anyway, I’m sharing with Bill. The girls are friends, so we’ll pick them up together,” Ben adds, and Richie looks shocked.

“You too, Big Bill? Damn, I’m surrounded by snobs,” Richie jokes. “Thank God my man Stan gets me, right?” He holds up his hand waiting for a high five, but Stan just looks at the hand unimpressed.

“My dad is letting me drive his new Cadillac to prom so, yeah, I’m not renting a limo,” Stan says, pretty proud of himself too.

Eddie guesses this is the right time to say it. They’re less than a week ahead of prom and Eddie should totally speak up if he doesn’t want things to get even worse than how they’re going to get already. He touches his inhaler in his pocket, making sure it’s there in case he needs it. He clears his throat before he speaks, and that’s actually worse because now everybody is looking at him.

“I, uh. I’m renting a limo too. Like, it was obvious I’m not driving ‘cause I’m not driving and my mom would freak out so bad if I asked for her car, but she said a limo would be nice and she even suggested a rental company so, yeah,” he nods, not really looking at any of the guys. “And, by the way, this girl Kay Addams asked me for prom, like

she was ditched at the last minute or something and she heard I wasn't… going with anyone, so. So I said, what the hell, she's pretty and everything and I probably should… stop worrying about germs and stuff if I ever want to marry and have kids, right?" He laughs, but it comes out weird and shaky, and he shakes his head quickly, not looking at Richie when he speaks again. "So, Richie you should. You should try to get Sandra back. Or some other girl, I'm sure you won't have a problem finding a date."

There's just a couple of seconds of silence, maybe three at most, but Eddie feels them like hours, like days. Eddie thought the guys would jump in immediately, maybe laughing or mocking him or saying something like 'it was about time, Eddie' but they just stay in silence.

"Sure, Eds," Richie finally says, taking his pack of smokes and bringing one to his lips. The nickname hits Eddie harder than ever before. '*I think I love you, Eds*'. That name will never feel the same, will never taste the same.

The rest of the guys start talking again then too, some of them asking Eddie about the girl but not too much, changing the subject to when to meet Mike after prom, where to go, and the like. Richie doesn't really participate, and after a few minutes he puts on his headphones and lies down with his hands behind his head. Eddie tries not to look at him. He tries to let the weird feeling in his guts pass.

*

He never sees Richie smile again.

Eddie doesn't know if it's just when he's around or always, but he's afraid to ask. He tries to convince himself it's just a coincidence at first, that maybe Richie was worried about something else. It's the end of the school year after all, their lives are about to change. Eddie is not stupid, though, and he only can fool himself so far. How much he misses those days when he was jealous of the guys when they made Richie laugh. Now he just wants to see Richie smile, no matter

the reason. Eddie just needs to know he’s happy.

Even the guys are acting differently now, not too much, but enough. They’re not blind and, even if they were, Richie’s behavior speaks volumes. His jokes are bitter and he’s more sarcastic than ever before, sometimes borderline offensive, some other times just plain rude. Eddie knows he’s not responsible for Richie’s behavior, no one is forcing him to be an asshole but, at the same time, he can’t help feeling a little guilty.

"He fought with Mike again yesterday," Stan says. They're going to pick up their suits for prom, since both of them had to get it tailored. "I don't know, he was being offensive as hell, like *too much* even for Richie. I mean… Mike punched him…" he says, and Eddie opens his eyes wide.

"What the fuck?" He can't believe it. "What is wrong with Mike?"

"Eddie… He was totally asking for it," Stan twists his lips, sighing. "In fact, sometimes I think that's what he wants. It's like he wants us to get mad at him and… fight him," Stan says, but he must see that's not enough for Eddie, so he smiles a little and pats Eddie's back. "Don't worry, I'm watching over him, I made sure Mike didn't leave a mark," he jokes, looking at Eddie. "And I'm pretty sure I'll be the next one punching him if he keeps it on, so you know I'll do it with love."

"You're so funny. Are you auditioning for the Trashmouth position in the club now?" Eddie asks with a lopsided smile.

"Hey! *Rude!*"

Stan keeps talking about other things, especially about how excited he is to drive his dad's Cadillac. Eddie tries to pay attention, but he can't help his mind drifting to what Stan said about Richie. Is he actually putting himself in danger? Is he acting like this just around his friends or around others too?

He wants to be able to talk to him. Eddie never imagined they would come to a point where he and Richie wouldn't talk, wouldn't share each other's worries. Maybe Richie being an asshole is not Eddie's fault, but they not talking anymore totally is.

That evening, while Eddie is getting ready for prom, trying to fix his stupid bowtie even if he knows his mom will do it for him no matter what the moment he walks downstairs, he thinks about what has happened. Just a week ago, when Eddie pictured him getting ready for prom he could see himself excited. Going there with Richie seemed risky but also incredibly fun. A little smile spreads on Eddie's face but it turns out bitter right away. He's the one to blame. He and his stupid cowardice.

His mom is happy, though. Eddie is sure she wouldn't be if going with Kay Addams were Eddie's first choice, but since she absolutely hated the idea of Eddie going with Richie, going with a girl now is considerably an improvement. She asks him to take a lot of pictures and be extremely careful. He kisses her cheek and promises everything will be okay.

Eddie freezes the moment he walks out the door.

Richie is there, right in front of his house. He’s wearing a black tuxedo with a white shirt, a couple of buttons open so Eddie can see his white undershirt too. His sleeves are rolled up, and he’s wearing untied boots. He shouldn't be smoking because, if Eddie can see right, there's a wound on his lip, but he is anyway, leaning on his dad’s old Mustang. He’s not wearing his glasses, but he’s staring at Eddie.

Those graffiti were right, Eddie is sure now. God must totally hate fags because there’s no other reason why Eddie would deserve this torture. Richie looks so gorgeous. And he shouldn’t, fuck, he shouldn’t. He shouldn’t look this good when he’s all disheveled, his naturally curly hair down loose, his clothes and shoes not even matching. He shouldn’t look this good and still, he’s the most beautiful thing Eddie has seen in his life. He wants to look away, hide his shame, but he can’t, he can’t take his eyes off Richie.

He’s shaking the moment he takes the first step up, the limo is waiting right in front of him, to his right. Richie is on the left, and Eddie feels like he’s being forced to choose between heaven and hell. He’s not sure which one is each, though.

Eddie’s feet move and, the closer he gets, the tighter the knot in his throat feels. His whole body is screaming for him to turn left, to go to

Richie, to hug him and kiss him and ask for forgiveness, to tell him he loves him too, he always has, and he's pretty sure he always will.

His mind has other plans.

His eyes linger on Richie as he turns right, opening the back door of the limo. Richie just keeps staring at him, watching him go. He takes the last drag of his cigarette and lets it fall to the pavement, stepping on it to put it down. Eddie thinks he can see Richie sigh before he moves and opens the driver's door. Eddie chooses to look away, giving the limo driver the address of his date.

*

Kay Addams looks really beautiful. She's wearing a long black velvet dress with a sheer cut out around her waist, and her hair is up in twisted knots with gems and clips. Her makeup is darker than Eddie has seen the other girls wear. She would look so good with Richie, both of them looking like some kind of goth superstar couple.

They look awkward when Mrs. Addams takes some pictures of them. Kay is wearing low heels but she's taller than Eddie anyway. She could be a model, maybe, if she ran away from this hellhole city. She's the one who makes up conversation on their way to prom. She seems nice, Eddie thinks they could have been friends if they had met before.

Bill and Ben are already there when Eddie arrives, and both of them look awfully good along with their dates. Kay doesn't know the other girls, so she mostly talks to Bill and Ben apart from Eddie. It's not long before Stan and his date arrive too, and Eddie has to hold back a laugh when he sees Stan's hair all slicked back.

"Okay, so now it's only Richie left and we can all go take a group picture," Ben says. "It's a shame Bev and Mike aren't here too."

"I'm sure w-we'll take a nice picture all of us together s-sometime soon," Bill smiles, standing on his tiptoes and looking around. "Isn't

Richie here yet? Have any of you guys seen him?"

"I. I did," Eddie says, raising his voice now that the music is louder. He tries to think quickly what else to say, how to explain. "He was. I mean, he's coming for sure, 'cause he was all dressed up."

"Did you talk to him?" Stan asks, and Eddie twists his lips.

"I… The limo arrived and. I didn't. I mean, I thought I would meet him here," he tries to explain. The guys look at him for a second, and Eddie thinks he can see something on Bill's eyes, but maybe it's just his imagination.

"We can always take the picture later. I'm gonna have a drink and dance, right?" Stan says, holding hands with his date and smiling at her. They look good together, too. Eddie guesses he's the only one who doesn't really match with his date.

"Do you want to dance too?" Kay asks, and Eddie nods. There's nothing else to do anyway.

Kay is cool. Eddie finds out when he actually pays attention to her she's a very fun girl, and she talks about a lot of things, so Eddie doesn't get bored. He doesn't know how he ended up coming to prom with someone like her, though. Eddie is sure any guy would kill for enjoying her company. She even makes some pretty good jokes! Eddie is surprised. Sometimes she even reminds him of Beverly.

"I knew her," Kay says when they go for a drink, grabbing some snacks too. "We weren't friends but I had a few classes with her. She seemed nice."

"Beverly is awesome. She's better than any of us for sure, and so much cooler. I don't know how she ended up being friend of us."

"You guys are not that bad," she laughs, and Eddie laughs too. The music changes then, and Crazy by Aerosmith starts playing. Kay takes Eddie by his hand and pulls him to the dancefloor. "I love this song!"

"Do you?"

Eddie doesn't know anyone who listens to Aerosmith except for

Richie. When Kay puts her hands on Eddie's shoulders and they start dancing, Eddie wonders how would it be to dance this song with him. Would he want to dance in the first place? Eddie doesn't know if Richie likes slow dancing. Maybe he does, maybe he's slow dancing right now to the same song on this same dancefloor.

The music keeps playing and Eddie closes his eyes, remembering every time he's heard Richie sing this song out loud, how excited he was when the album came out. How he used to hug Eddie close with just an arm, laughing and singing with his nose buried in Eddie's hair.

I go crazy, crazy, baby, I go crazy

You turn it on

Then you're gone

Yeah you drive me

Crazy, crazy, crazy, for you baby

Fuck, he would kill to dance to this song with Richie, no matter how stupid they'd look. He wants to be the one wrapping his arms around Richie's neck, Richie's hands on his waist He wants to slow dance and look at each other's eyes and smile and laugh and he wants to be every fucking teenage movie cliché. And he wants them all with Richie.

"Kay, I… I need to tell you something," Eddie feels his heart start racing. It's okay. He can do this. He's done harder things, and it's time to be brave again. Fuck the world. He can do this. "Listen, I… You're super cool, like, really nice and funny and everything, but I don't really. Like. I'm not into you that way."

"What way?" Kay asks, and she looks confused.

"Like. I mean, I'm not into you as a girl," he says again, but her face doesn't change, like she doesn't really get what Eddie is saying. He takes a deep breath and gets ready. He needs to say it. Whatever happens after this, if she slaps him, if she calls him out, Eddie can take it. "I'm not into girls. I like guys."

Woah. He's said it. He's actually said it. Eddie almost wants to laugh right now. It wasn't that hard, and it feels *so* good. It'd feel even better if he didn't have his date's hands so close to his neck. Right now, Eddie can expect any reaction, and getting choked and killed at prom is not a nice death. Kay only raises an eyebrow, though, and her face doesn't really change that much.

"Okay? So? Why do you think I asked you to prom?" She asks, and now it's Eddie's turn to get really confused. "I mean, it's pretty obvious you're not straight. Maybe you can fool straight people, but you can't fool your own," she says lowering her voice, and there's a smile on her face when she leans in, looking at Eddie's eyes. "Yeah, I'm on your team. So I'm not into you, either. Is that cool?"

"What?" Eddie blinks a couple times. Is he hearing well?

"I'm into girls," she says, and she laughs too. "I thought you knew."

"I didn't…" Eddie has a lot of questions. How did she know about him? Is he that obvious? Who else knows? But above all things, what he feels right now is relief. So he doesn't need to pretend anymore, at least here, with her. Well, that's great, because he has something more important to do. "Okay, this conversation isn't over. But… I need to go find someone right now. Sorry."

Eddie walks away before she can agree. The song is not over yet and Eddie wants to find Richie before it is. He doesn't even know what he's going to do if Richie is already dancing with someone else, but he'll think about it when it happens. He feels brave now, he needs to take advantage of it. He even laughs to himself, thinking about stealing Richie from whoever girl he's with.

He looks around standing on his tiptoes, trying to spot a head full of messy curly hair, but he can't see anything, and it's too dark in there anyway. He moves through the crowd, looking around. Stan is near the snack table talking to his date. Ben is dancing a few feets away. Eddie keeps looking around, walking the place. It's not that big, but there's a lot of people. He goes near the stage so he can see the whole crowd better. He spots all his friends except for Richie, and a weird feeling forms in his stomach. The song has ended long ago, so Eddie's plan has gone to hell, but now there's something more important, and

that's knowing where the fuck is Richie.

Eddie goes to the toilets and waits at the door like a creep for a few minutes, then goes outside because maybe Richie has gone out for a smoke. There are some people smoking there, actually, but Richie is nowhere to be seen. When he goes back inside, he's starting to feel a little upset.

He sees Ben in the middle of the dancefloor, and he's about to go to him and ask him if he's seen Richie, but the Ben leans in to speak in his date's ear, and they both giggle before she takes his hand and walks to the door. Okay, so asking Ben is out of the question. Eddie keeps walking, and maybe he's starting to freak out a little because he starts asking random people if they've seen Richie. Some of them look at him weird but mostly what Eddie gets is negative answers. No one has seen Richie and he's starting to get desperate.

"Bill! Bill, have you seen Richie? I can't find him," Eddie runs to Bill when he sees him, raising his voice because he can't hear himself with the music. Bill looks at him and makes a face. He looks at his date and says something to her in her ear, and then he moves, putting a hand on Eddie's back to make him come with him. They go to a quieter place, near one of the doors. "What? What is it?"

"Are you sure he was c-coming?" Bill asks, making a worried face. Eddie frowns.

"Well, I'm. He was dressed up and everything. Why would he…" Eddie doesn't finish the sentence. Yeah, Richie was dressed up, ready for prom. Ready to go together, waiting for him. Eddie looks at Bill, biting his lip. "He's coming. Right?"

"I don't know," Bill twists his lips, looking back at Eddie. "I t-talked to him this morning about, you know, how he-he's acting all weird lately. And he said something about wanting to leave this t-town. But he said…" Bill looks away for a second and sighs. "He s-said he wanted to t-talk to you first."

"What?" Eddie shakes his head. No. That can't… "Leaving? When? No, that's not. He can't! Bill, he can't leave!" Eddie fists Bill's jacket, his eyes opening wide as he starts to feel a rush in his veins. Bill just

stays calm, though, putting a hand on Eddie's shoulder, trying to calm him down. "What the fuck, Bill? He can't leave! He was supposed to come here!"

"I-I-I'm… I'm sorry, Eddie," Bill raises his hand to hold Eddie's cheek, trying to comfort him, but Eddie moves away like it burns. He pats his pockets quickly. Fuck, he didn't bring his inhaler. He's having a panic attack. "Listen. Maybe. M-Maybe he's not gone yet. If he s-said he wanted to talk to you, maybe h-he…"

"No!" Eddie shakes his head, he's shaking all over, there's so much going on in his head right now it's like his body can't take it. He looks at Bill, finding a sympathetic look on his face. "I… I left." He says, clenching his jaw so hard he can feel the pressure on his teeth. "He came and… and I left him there, I didn't even talk to him. He was there, he was waiting for me and I left him there. He was." He's starting to hyperventilate, and Bill holds one of his hands tight, giving him a soft look that says 'it's going to be okay'. It's not, though. It's not going to be okay. "I've left him down so much, I don't even deserve him wanting to talk to me. But he wanted to. And still, I left him again. 'Cause I'm a coward. I'm a fucking coward, Bill!" He says hysterically, hitting his chest with his free hand. "I freaked out and I was afraid of-of fucking everything! I was so afraid and… I fucked up."

"Eddie, i-it's okay," Bill tries to calm him down, getting closer. Eddie looks at his eyes, desperately wanting that to be truth. It's not. Fuck, it's not.

“I fucked up. I. I fucked up, right? Jesus, *fuck*!” Eddie rubs his face hard, feeling his chest contract when the tears start coming down. Fuck. Fuck, what has he done? “I fucked up so bad, Bill. I lost him. I… I was so stupid to think he’ll stay anyway, why the fuck would he stay? Why? Why would he want to even be near me?” He wants to scratch his own face, pull his own hair, hurt himself. He wants to hurt himself so much on the outside he can’t feel how much he’s hurting on the inside. He looks up, tears rolling down his face, pressing his lips together before he finally says it. “I love him, Bill. I… I’m in. I’m in love with him.”

He looks down and shuts his eyes, waiting for the storm to come. He

doesn’t want to see Bills disgusted face, he doesn’t want to watch their friendship come to an end. Whatever it must happen, Eddie just wants it to happen as soon as possible. He’s ready. He’s ready to take it. So he waits for it. And waits, but nothing comes.

Only when he opens his eyes again and look up at Bill he can see the soft expression on his friend’s face. Bill reaches in, touching Eddie’s shoulder, then the side of his head, and he smiles.

“I know,” he says soft, nodding and licking his lips. “I-I know, Eddie. Wuh-We all know. Since…” Bill just shakes his head, still smiling, moving his fingers on Eddie’s hair in a soothing way. “It’s okay. I promise you, it’s okay.”

Eddie’s eyes widen, tears still coming up. Something opens inside his chest at the same time that something crashes. It’s okay, Bill said, they all know. And it’s okay. Eddie feels like he could pass out any moment now, his body and his mind feeling completely disconnected. He can’t believe it. All he’s done, all he’s sacrificed, all he’s suffered, it’s been for nothing. He was so afraid of losing his friends he didn’t notice he was losing something more important. He was losing his life.

He wipes his face with the back of his hand, nodding. He crashes on Bill’s arms when he opens them, hugging tightly and even laughing a little because he can’t believe the relief he’s feeling. When they break apart, Bill looks at him, and Eddie nods again because he can read Bills eyes.

“I need to find him,” Eddie says, breathing deep and closing his eyes. “I need to find him."

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

> So this is it, guys, this is the end. Thank you so much for staying this whole journey, I had a lot of fun and felt very welcomed in this fandom. I'm actually sad this is over, I want to keep writing about these guys, they're just so cute to write! Anyway, I hope you like this chapter and enjoy it as much as the rest.
>
> Lots of love
>
> -R

Eddie never thought he'd spend prom like this. But then again, Eddie never thought he'd have a thing with Richie, then be asked to prom, then freak out on Richie, then be asked to prom again, go to prom with Kay, realize he's tired of hiding, and come out to his friends (okay, just Bill but, once Bill knows, the rest will know too eventually). It's been a crazy month.

Bill offers to look for Richie around the place too, see if maybe Eddie had just really bad luck finding people, although that didn't seem probable. They asked the rest of the guys and none of them had seen Richie either. Just thinking about the possibility of Richie being gone already, far away from here, makes Eddie sick. He can't waste more time at this stupid party, he needs to move, needs to get out and find him.

Making a mental list of places Richie likes to go seems the best way to start, places where Richie feels good enough to go there after getting his heart broken by Stupid Eddie Kaspbrak. Eddie is so nervous, though, he can't even think straight, so Bill helps him

suggesting some places, and Ben helps too, telling him the best route to go to those places in the shortest amount of time. Stan, on the other hand, is not helping at all.

“He’s not gone,” He says rolling his eyes. Eddie would like to punch him but he’s not starting a fight now. There are more important things to do. “He’s Richie. He’s just being Richie, but he’s not going anywhere. Trust me.”

“How do you know? Huh? What, are you a Richie expert now? You have a fucking radar and know where exactly he is right now? ‘Cause I’d like you to tell me if that’s so!” Eddie says, and Stan shakes his head like he’s done with this already. “Look, maybe you can stay here and dance and shit, but I can’t. I can’t because if I stay here and go home and then woke up tomorrow to some of you dipshits calling me on the phone saying Richie’s gone for good I’ll die. You hear me? *Dead*.”

“Don’t you think you’re being a little overdramatic?” Stan frowns. Overdramatic? Well, maybe. Maybe he is. But he doesn’t give a fuck. Eddie is losing his nerves, holding up his hands to emphasize his words because he can’t believe he needs to explain this.

“You don’t get it, right? It’s my fault. He’s gone because of me, he’s gone because I was an insensitive asshole who only thought about his own feelings and hurt his fucking *best friend*, and if I don’t fix it… If I…” If he doesn’t fix it, if he can’t fix it, then he’d be responsible for hurting one of the nicest, happiest, best guys he’s ever known. It’d mean he’s hurt his best friend to a point where he can’t even stand existing in the same space anymore. I’d mean he’s broken the only person who has ever loved him, really loved him, not as a friend, but as a whole. Loved his quirks, his bad mood, his rants about germs, his fears. Eddie feels his chest tightening. “I need to fix it. I need to talk to him. He needs to know…” Eddie swallows. Stan looks at him and then looks at Bill.

Eddie doesn’t know what Stan knows, what he and Bill have talked about in the past, if they know more than they say out loud, if they’ve known even before Eddie knew. What Eddie knows is how Stan looks at Bill, and the way Bill looks back at Stan.

“Even… Even if he *were* running away or whatever, how are you going to look for him? You can’t walk the whole town. It’s late, it can be dangerous!”

Stan’s right. If he wants to find Richie, if he wants to have at least a chance to find him, he can’t walk to every destination. That’d waste too much time, and Richie has his car. He could have gone anywhere.

“I need your car,” Eddie suddenly says. “Please. *Please*, I need your car,” he begs when Stan looks at him shocked, shaking his head. “What if… What if he’s doing something stupid, what if I can’t find him on time. I just. I need to find him, Stan.”

“But it’s my dad’s… And you’ve never…” Stan closes his eyes and manages to sigh and groan at the same time, reaching for the keys in his pocket and tossing them to Eddie. “If something happens to the car you’re dead, you hear me? Dead!”

“Thank you so much I love you bye.” Eddie holds the keys tight in his hand and runs to the nearest exit.

The moment he gets behind the wheel, Eddie freezes and doesn't know what to do. This is so dangerous, he shouldn’t be driving without a license, he shouldn’t be doing this at all. If his mom saw him she would freak out so much she would have an aneurysm. He tries to remember the classes he took when he was sixteen. He was good at it, he never had a problem, but then again, he wasn't as stressed as he is right now. He closes his eyes and breathes, moving the driving stick and stepping on the gas pedal. This is it. Fuck, this is it. He just hopes Stan doesn't kill him if he ends up fucking up his car too.

*

The first place he goes is the Barrens. It'd be crazy to be down here at this hour of the night, but it's Richie and Richie is not exactly the most logical person. Eddie’s glad Stan has a flashlight in his trunk to

look around. In any other situation he'd be scared to death being here in the dark, but he can't think about being scared right now. He needs to find Richie.

He walks and walks and goes to places they don't usually visit when they're together, but he can't leave the place without looking everywhere. He's holding back tears by the time he goes back to the car, but he's not going to cry. No, he can't allow himself to break down right now, he needs to keep looking for Richie, he needs his mind clear. So he sniffs and wipes his nose with the back of his hand, getting behind the wheel again. Next stop: the canal.

Then the Aladdin.

Then the Kitchener Ironworks, and Derry Civic Center, and even around the standpipe.

Then every diner, every parking lot, every street.

Even Neibolt Street. 29 Neibolt Street.

Eddie feels a sudden rush of fear paralyzing him when he parks in front of the house. Something… Something happened here, something his mind worked a lot to forget. And now it's like a tsunami, flooding his memory. Sickness and rotten flesh, words that had been stuck for so long in the back of his head. He thinks of balloons as he walks into the house, calling Richie's name as loud as he can.

"If you're here… If you're here you're damn crazy and I don't know why the hell would you choose this fucking place, but please. If you're here, say something. Please." His voice echoes inside the house. "I love you! I love you, okay? I'm in love with you. I'm fucking crazy for you, you hear me?!" He shouts, panting when he finishes talking to the air.

He waits. Calls Richie's name again. Then leaves.

He's almost thankful Richie wasn't there except for how that means Eddie hasn't found him yet. The worst thing is feeling the time pass, knowing every minute he wastes looking somewhere Richie is not,

Richie can be farther and farther away. He's almost desperate when he decides he's got nothing to lose going to Richie's house. He highly doubts Richie would be there, he hardly is at home on a regular basis, Eddie knows it's not the place Richie would choose when he's feeling… however Richie might be feeling right now.

His heart starts beating faster, though, when he gets to Richie's house and sees Richie's car (his dad's, whatever) parked in front of the garage. If his car is here that means he couldn't have gone too far. Or it means he's taken a bus and he's miles away from here already… Eddie holds that thought and walks to the door, ringing the doorbell.

It's Richie's mom, Maggie, who opens the door, and she looks at him surprised but she doesn't look sad or worried or anything a mom would look like if her son had gone missing. She's Richie's mom, though. Would she even know if her son went missing?

"Hi, Eddie. Can I help you, honey?" She sounds like she usually does. Eddie twists his hands together. Maybe now she'll tell him to go upstairs, like she always does when Richie is in his room.

"Hi, Mrs. Tozier. Um," he swallows, trying to sound calm. "Is Richie here?"

"Richie?" She asks and she looks back inside for a second. "He is…" In his room. He's in his room. Right? *Right??* Eddie twists his fingers impatiently. Come on, just say it! She frowns then, shaking her head and smiling. "Oh, he's at prom. It's prom night, right? That's why you look so handsome. Look how much you've grown up, Eddie," she says with a smile. Eddie tries to say thank you but the words get stuck in his throat. "You should be at prom too! I'm sure Richie is waiting for you there," she smiles.

I wish he were

"Okay," Eddie nods and smiles the best he can. "Thank you, Mrs. Tozier."

"It's no problem, dear."

So.

So this is it.

He needs to accept it, he doesn't know Richie at all. He can't find him, he doesn't know where he is, and he can't think of any more places to look at. He feels so stupid thinking somehow loving Richie would make him magically know where to find him, like in those movies where that person, the one, always knows the secret place the other one likes to go when they feel down, when they feel alone, because that's what soulmates do, they know each other that well. Maybe Richie doesn't have a place like that, or maybe he never told Eddie if he does. Richie never talks about being sad or alone, anyway. How can Eddie know what he does when he feels like that?

Eddie opens his eyes, feeling a cold shiver run up his spine.

Maybe he does know.

It's crazy and improbable, but maybe, just maybe, Eddie knows where Richie is, he knows Richie's secret place.

*

He goes back to prom as fast as he can. His mother would kill him if she knew what Eddie has been doing with the car. As soon as he finds Stan, he asks him please to drive him home and take care of Kay for him, although he’s pretty sure Kay could take care of herself. Stan is mostly grateful of his car being sound and safe, so he does, and Stan's date even offers to look for Kay and apologize in Eddie's name. He can't be more grateful for the friends he has.

He looks at his front door once Stan has gone, feeling so many things his stomach doesn't stop twisting and he can't believe he hasn't thrown up yet. Every step he takes, the feeling is stronger, to the point that he's shaking and probably pale by the time he's walked around the house. He can't go through the door, his mom is probably there waiting for him, and he can't stop to answer questions right now. So he climbs up his own window.

This is it. Either he finds Richie here or he'll give up and accept Richie is gone. At least he'll be at home and he could cry himself to sleep if it happens to be the latter.

He does want to cry when he finally reaches the window, looking inside the dark room. He wants to cry and laugh and scream. The room is in the dark except for the tiny spot lightened by his bedside lamp. Right near the light, sitting on the floor, is Richie, resting his back on the wall, smoking something that doesn't smell like tobacco. Eddie is so happy he doesn't even care about the smoke stinking his clothes. Richie is here. He found him.

His room is Richie's secret place. Richie's safe place.

“Fuck,” Richie mutters when Eddie gets in through the open window, looking away for a second and sighing, taking a drag and blowing out the smoke. “You should be at prom.”

Eddie closes his eyes for a second. He doesn't want to cry, but he's so happy to hear Richie's voice. He thought he wouldn't hear it ever again.

“You should too. But instead, you’re trespassing,” Eddie smiles soft, walking up to Richie. “And you’re smoking weed,” he adds, making Richie snort a short laugh.

“I like to call it ‘jazz cigarette’,” Richie says, trying to do some kind of voice but not really putting much effort in it. He looks at Eddie. “You should call the cops.”

“Yeah, I should…” He says, taking a deep breath and gathering the courage to sit down too near Richie, resting his back on the wall. For a moment he doesn’t know what else to say. He was so eager to find Richie, so desperate, now that he’s here Eddie doesn’t know what to do with it. They stay in silence, quiet. The only thing that keeps moving is the smoke coming out of the joint. Eddie smiles, snorting a soft laugh. “Is that weed, though? ‘Cause it wouldn’t be the first time…” He chuckles, and he smiles even more when he sees Richie shaking his head and laughing too. He’s laughing. Eddie’s heart is going to burst.

“I was a kid, asshole,” Richie says, looking at Eddie sideways. “You guys won’t let me live that down, right?”

“You tried to get high on *bamboo*,” Eddie laughs. “It’s too funny to let it go.”

“It wasn’t even bamboo. That shit wasn’t bamboo, we called it bamboo ‘cause we were dumb. And also kids.” Richie sighs and looks at his joint, taking another drag and looking at Eddie, letting the smoke out slowly. “How old were we? Twelve? Jesus fuck…”

“You were a precocious kid,” Eddie says, looking back at Richie.

“I was a little shit, I didn’t even… Hell, I hated smoking, but it made people pay attention to me. That’s all I wanted,” Richie says looking at Eddie’s eyes until he lowers his head, sighing again. Eddie has never heard him talk about things like that, Richie doesn’t get serious. Fun and games, that’s what Richie does. “I liked how you used to wrinkle your little nose in disgust. You were so fun to tease…” He rubs his face with his hand, lowering his head more so his hair fall over his eyes. “You always paid attention to me. No matter what I did, no matter how stupid it was, you always had time to listen. I just… I couldn’t help it, Eddie,” Richie’s voice breaks and Eddie feels a cold sweat gathering on the back of his neck. Is he crying? Richie doesn’t cry. Richie is the fucking opposite of crying. Is he really…?

“*Richie?*” Eddie asks soft, carefully, moving just a little, trying to look at his face.

“I understand. I. I do understand you can’t love me back like that, and I know I shouldn’t have gotten myself into this, trying to… fucking trick you into being with me. I’m stupid. I am. I know, but… Please,” Richie’s voice breaks again, and he sobs. Eddie didn’t know he could feel like dying and still be alive. “I need you. I need to… be with you and laugh with you and make stupid jokes with you, and I need to feel whole again, ‘cause I can’t live knowing I fucked up the best thing I’ve ever had. I can’t. I need my best friend, I… I feel so alone, Eds.”

No. No, what? No! Eddie shakes his head, moving closer to Richie.

What the hell? What has he done? How can Richie think that way? Has Eddie really hurt him that much? No. Fuck. No!

“Don’t…” Eddie tries to get the words out of his mouth as Richie wipes his cheek and smiles bitterly.

“I know, I know, don’t call you Eds…”

“Shut up!” Eddie screams, making Richie look at him startled. He’s shaking, his whole body is shaking, clenching his hands into fists, pressing his lips together. “Are you— Are you out of your mind?? What the fuck are you talking about? Are you— No! No, shit. I. I was the one who fucked up!” He says, hitting his chest with his palm. “I’m the asshole, I’m the stupid, coward, piece of shit who hurt you. And I hate myself and you should too!”

“I can’t hate you, Eddie, I lov—“

“Me too!” He interrupts Richie, who looks at him in disbelief. “I do. I love you,” he says, and he bats his hand when Richie is about to say something stupid for sure. “And no, I don’t mean like I love Bill or Stan or the rest of the guys. I love you. I’m…” He presses his lips together when he feels the blush in his cheeks. “I’m in love with you. There, I said it.”

“You WHAT??” Richie looks shocked. Eddie can’t blame him. His face is almost funny, though, so Eddie smiles a little.

“I know! I know I fucked up and acted like the total opposite, and I promise I didn’t… I didn’t even know myself because I’ve spent my whole life trying not to be what everybody said I was. But, deep down, even if I didn’t want to put a name on it I knew how I felt when I was with you. I knew it. And then you started acting like that, we started fooling around and everything fucking grew up like crazy. It was too much to handle. And suddenly I was afraid. I… I was so afraid of… everything! I was scared, ‘cause I’m a coward. You know that. You know I’m a coward, you know I’m a fucking pussy! And, and I was afraid of my mom and the school and the-the fucking whole town and… and myself! I was afraid of…” Eddie shakes his head fast, pressing his lips together. “But none of that was scarier than losing you!” He raises his hands, panting. Richie opens up his

eyes wide, and Eddie blinks. “I…” He shakes his head and lowers his eyes. “Nothing… was scarier than losing you. Thinking about you leaving me just…”

“Leave you?” Richie snorts a laugh, shaking his head and looking at his joint. “Like I could leave you, Eds… You’re my life.”

“Jesus, Richie, shut up,” Eddie rubs his face, hiding his blush under his hand.

“Fuck no. You always tell me to shut up. When I say stupid things, when I say good things, when I say cheesy things. Do you really hate my voice that much?” Richie asks, but there’s a smile in his voice. Eddie looks at him sideways and sighs.

“No, asshole. I actually love it,” he says, and he can see Richie is as surprised hearing this as he is saying it. “You make me stupid for you.”

“Wow, you really are in love with me.”

“Shut up!” Eddie throws a punch but Richie stops him, laughing and opening Eddie’s fist to tangle their fingers together.

“I’m gonna kiss you now,” Richie warns as he pulls Eddie closer.

It’s just that, just a few words and Richie can change the whole atmosphere. Suddenly Eddie is aware of everything. Of the breeze coming through the window, of the yellow light making Richie’s eyes glow, of the warmth of their hands tangled together. Of Richie. So close.

“Will that make you shut up?” Eddie asks trying to sound cool, but his heart is already pumping loud in his ear.

“Can’t guarantee that.”

They’re both smiling when Richie leans in and kisses Eddie, and it’s kind of stupid but Eddie can’t help noticing how it feels different. No matter how many times they do this, it always feels different, new, exciting. Eddie breathes and kisses back, wrinkling his nose when Richie’s tongue touches his.

“What?” Richie leans back, looking at him with a worried face. Eddie moves his hand, shaking his head too so Richie doesn’t worry, but he laughs.

“You taste like an ashtray,” he says, and Richie makes a guilty face, looking at the joint still between his fingers.

“Oh, shit, you’re right. I probably should do something about that if I’m gonna be kissing you on a daily basis. Because… I’m gonna be kissing you on a daily basis, right?” Richie asks carefully. Eddie closes his eyes and lowers his head, nodding when a little smile spread on his face. “Then I’ll quit. No. No, you know what? I’m quitting right now.” He says, putting out the joint on the sole of his shoe, looking at Eddie. “But, that means every time I want to smoke I have to kiss you instead.”

“It’s a fair price,” Eddie nods, putting his hand on Richie’s chest to stop him when he leans back in again. “Not now, though. You still taste like I’m gonna get lung cancer just being in contact with your spit.”

“Who says I’m gonna kiss you on the lips, dipshit?” Richie shakes his head and puts a hand on the back of Eddie’s head, pulling at him at the same times he moves to kiss Eddie’s neck.

It sends shivers down his spine, feeling Richie’s lips run up his skin, using his tongue and his teeth sometimes too. Eddie doesn’t know when or how he moves, but he finds himself straddling Richie with a hand fisting Richie’s hair, trying to get as close as he can because Richie’s warmth is addictive. Eddie breathes shakily when Richie pulls up his shirt, getting his hands under Eddie’s clothes, touching his skin. It surrounds him, the heat. Richie’s hands feel huge on his back, and Eddie wonders when the hell got Richie so tall.

He moves his own hand to unbutton his shirt just a little, taking his bowtie off, just so Richie can kiss him a bit lower. Richie laughs against his skin, and he hugs Eddie closer, a little rougher, biting his collarbone and making Eddie press his lips tight to repress a moan.

“Okay. Okay, stop,” Eddie breathes out, pushing Richie back softly. Richie looks at him with questioning eyes. “No, it’s. If you keep doing

that then I'll want something more and then more and then, when I can't get more, we'll have to stop and I won't want to stop, so I'll push you to give me something more and we both know your willpower is shit so you'll do it and we'll put ourselves in danger just because we're young and stupid and horny."

"Horny? Are you getting horny, Eds? I mean, I knew I was sexy but I just kis—" Richie laughs and holds Eddie in place when he tries to move away with a loud groan. "Easy. Easy, I was joking…"

"You're such an asshole."

"I know," Richie smiles, moving his hands on Eddie's waist, lowering his eyes to his lips for a second. "You turn me on too," he says lowering his voice.

"Richie, shut…" Eddie looks away, feeling his cheeks burn. "Don't say it like that."

"So cute," Richie kisses his cheek, pushing locks of his hair behind his ear. He stays like that for a few minutes, just looking at Eddie, touching his hair, his cheeks, his lips. It makes Eddie feel things he's never felt before, things he can't put names on. "Let's get out of here. Of this town. Let's go to the city, let's… let's elope!" Richie laughs but he doesn't sound like he's joking. Eddie looks back at him, stares for a few seconds, thinking.

"Bill said you wanted to leave. That's why I got scared," he says, pursing his lips and looking down at Richie's shirt, playing with one of the buttons. "Do you want to leave?"

"I do. I hate this place. We all hate this place. What's our future if we stay here? What can this town offer us except for marrying some nice girl and having kids and working a boring job until the end of our days? I don't want that. I want something else, Eds, something I can't have here," He says, and he holds Eddie's chin to lift his head up. "I want you."

"Can you really have me, though? Somewhere else?" Eddie asks. He knows it's different in the city, he knows people leave and he's seen things on TV. New York, California, places where people like them

can live a different life. But how much different?

“I don’t know, but we can’t lose anything trying, right?” Richie smiles. “I won’t leave without you. So it’s your call. You can think about it, we don’t need to do it now. We’ve got time.”

Time. Eddie doesn’t really need time, he’s got a lot of questions already. He wants to ask Richie what about their lives here, what about their plans, what about their friends. If they leave, would they ever see Bill and Stan and Mike and Ben again? They hardly even see Beverly now. Also what about college? Richie’s been getting straight A’s since forever, he could get to any college he wants, full scholarship and everything. Would Richie really give up that just to run away with him? Eddie wouldn’t allow that. He can’t let Richie ruin his life like that.

Or maybe… maybe it’s just the fear talking again. Maybe it’s not about friends or college or even his mom. Maybe it’s the fear of fully accepting himself, to leave this town and realize he has no excuses to hide then, to face reality, himself, his relationship with Richie. Shit, he’s too young to be thinking about these things.

“How did you get this?” Eddie asks, touching the wound on Richie’s bottom lip, the scab looking still fresh. He doesn’t want to keep thinking about the future. Not yet. Like Richie said, he’s got time. “Was it Mike?”

“I deserved it,” Richie says, lowering his eyes and making a guilty face. “I was so… I said awful things just because I knew it would make him flip, and I needed someone to beat the shit out of me. He just punched me, though,” he snorts a dry laugh, rubbing his face with his hand. “I need to apologize to him. I just hope he accepts it.”

“He’s too nice, and also your friend. He won’t hold it against you,” Eddie says although he doesn’t really know what Richie has said to Mike. It has to be something really bad because Mike doesn’t get mad easily. On the other hand, Mike was already mad at Richie because of what he said about Adrian Mellon. Eddie wonders if Richie said something about that again. He also wonders if something happened between Mike and Adrian to make Mike react the way he did that time. “Why… did you need someone to beat the shit out of you?”

Richie sighs and shrugs, looking away.

“I just wanted to… forget,” he laughs, biting his lip. “I don’t know, I always do that, when I don’t want to think about something I just get into fights. I can’t think while I’m getting beaten,” he says, looking at Eddie. “I’m smarter now, though. I don’t pick fights with guys like Bowers like I used to do when I was a kid.”

“Smarter?” Eddie lifts his eyebrows. “Is that how you deal with your emotions, burying them under beatings?”

“I don’t like worrying people with my problems. Who cares if I feel lonely at home, if my dad said something mean today or if my mom doesn’t remember my birthday? It’s not important anyway… and honestly, I feel stupid letting it hurt me. So, I guess, I give myself a reason to feel hurt for real. Also, you’re the cutest when you get all worried and start ranting about having to take care of me, putting bandages on my knees,” Richie smiles, but Eddie doesn’t feel like smiling too.

“You’re fucking dumb, did you know that?” He asks and Richie giggles, pinching Eddie’s cheek. Eddie slaps his hand. “No, don’t laugh. I’m serious! You’re dumb as fuck, and I feel super offended. So you don’t like worrying people with your problems but you like worrying them getting into fights? Also what the fuck? *Who cares?* I care! I care and I don’t mind if you think it’s stupid feeling hurt for those things, I totally *ban* you from picking fights anymore. I’ll punch you if that’s what you need, but I’d rather, I don’t know, listen to you, maybe? Talk to me, tell me anything that worries you! You always listen to me, so I can listen to you too! And, if at the end of the day you feel like something’s missing, I’ll put a bandage on your knee too. But no more wounds. Okay? No more wounds.”

Eddie is still frowning when Richie opens up a sweet, warm smile, moving one of his hands up Eddie’s chest, hooking his fingers on the collar of Eddie’s undershirt, pulling at him and kissing him softly on the lips.

“I love you, Eddie,” Richie whispers, looking into Eddie’s eyes. “And if Ben is right and we live in a multiverse with infinite parallel realities like that guy Schrödinger said, I’m sure I fall in love with

you in every one of them as well," he says. Eddie needs to close his eyes then, unable to look at Richie's eyes and not melt right there. Richie kisses him on the cheek, hugs him closer to his chest. "Do you love me back?" He asks, whispering in Eddie's ear. "In those parallel worlds, do you love me back as well?"

Eddie moves to kiss Richie, kiss him properly this time. How could he have doubts about this, now that the universe is giving him the opportunity to be happy? Leaving, staying, coming out, keeping it secret, he doesn't care. Right now, lost in the kiss, Eddie doesn't care. The only thing that matters is them. Fuck everything else.

In those parallel worlds, do you love me back as well?

Eddie smiles, resting his head on Richie's, their noses touching, their lips brushing.

"Yes," he says, not even moving from where he is, from where he belongs. "In every world and every universe and everywhere. I always love you back. Fuck yes."